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CHRONICLES
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1
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YOU'RE AWARE OF WHAT'S HAPPENED?

DIFFICULT *NOT* TO BE, DON'T YOU THINK?

OUR VERY FOUNDATIONS WERE SHAKEN.

BELIEVE ME, I DON'T ENJOY YOUR COMPANY WELL ENOUGH TO *KEEP IT* WERE THE SITUATION NOT SERIOUS.

I ASSUME YOU'RE GOING TO TELL ME YOU HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT?
KEEP A CIVIL TONGUE, WITCH.
BE NICE.
OBVIOUSLY IT WAS NOT OUR DOING. NOT THAT YOU MEANT TO SUGGEST SUCH A THING.
Mm, NO, OF COURSE NOT.
WELL, THEN...
...YOU TELL *ME* WHO'S RESPONSIBLE.
WE HAVEN'T EVEN A NOTION OF WHO THEY ARE, MUCH LESS WHENCE THEY CAME.
ONE OF YOUR NUMBER MIGHT PROVIDE A WINDOW, THOUGH, YES?
IT'S WITHIN HIS SCOPE IF HE HAS HIS WITS ABOUT HIM.
OLD FOOL, WE HAVE NEED OF YOU.
OLD FOOL?

WE HAVE NEED OF YOU!
Ah.
DO YOU?
SHOW THEM TO US.
Oh, I LIVE TO SERVE.
THEY SIMPLY APPEARED, YOU KNOW, THESE NEW PLAYERS, EACH ON A DIFFERENT WORLD. THERE SEEMS LITTLE COMMON TO THEM...
...SAVE THAT THEY HAVE BEEN GRANTED THIS.
THIS SYMBOL.

mmmmhhh...
...what's...
...WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?

GISELLE...
...WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE?*
MY RITE OF ASCENSION IS *RUINED*. I'VE BEEN *SHAMED* IN FRONT OF THE OTHER MASTERS...
...AND WORSE, I DIDN'T RECEIVE THE SPIRIT MEANT FOR ME.
I... I KNOW.
I RECEIVED IT.
I THINK I RECEIVED *ALL* OF THEM.

YOU WHAT?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED. THIS... MAN I'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE, HE TOUCHED ME AND MY HAND FELT STRANGE, AND THEN THE SPIRITS WERE CHASING ME AND SOMEHOW...
...THEY WENT INTO ME.
YOU CAN SEE WHAT IT DID TO MY GUILD ROBES.
HOW COULD YOU, GISELLE?
YOU KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME, YOU KNOW HOW LONG I'VE WANTED IT.
MY OWN SISTER.
GENEVIEVE, PLEASE. I DIDN'T DO IT ON PURPOSE. I THINK...
...I THINK IT MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THIS. IT JUST... APPEARED.
I SWEAR, EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED WAS AN ACCIDENT.

...BUT YOU MIGHT WELL HAVE DESTROYED THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE GUILDS. AND ALL YOU CAN TELL ME IS IT WAS AN *ACCIDENT*.
YOU NEVER CHANGE, GISELLE, AND I'M ALWAYS LEFT TO CLEAN UP THE MESS. *I'M* THE ONE WHO HAS TO GO BACK IN THERE AND GIVE THEM SOME SORT OF EXPLANATION.
AN ACCIDENT.
HOW MANY TIMES, GISELLE? HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I HEARD THAT WHEN YOU CAN'T LIVE UP TO YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?
NOT ONLY HAVE YOU DESTROYED WHAT I'VE BEEN TRYING TO ACHIEVE MY ENTIRE LIFE...
PLEASE, GEN, I'M JUST AS—
AAA!
WHAKT
STOP IT.
FOR ONCE...
...JUST STOP IT.

DON'T YOU DARE WALK AWAY FROM...
...ME...
BUT I DIDN'T... MEAN TO DO THAT.
HOW DID I MAKE...?
Hey, don't look at me.
DID YOU JUST...
...TALK?

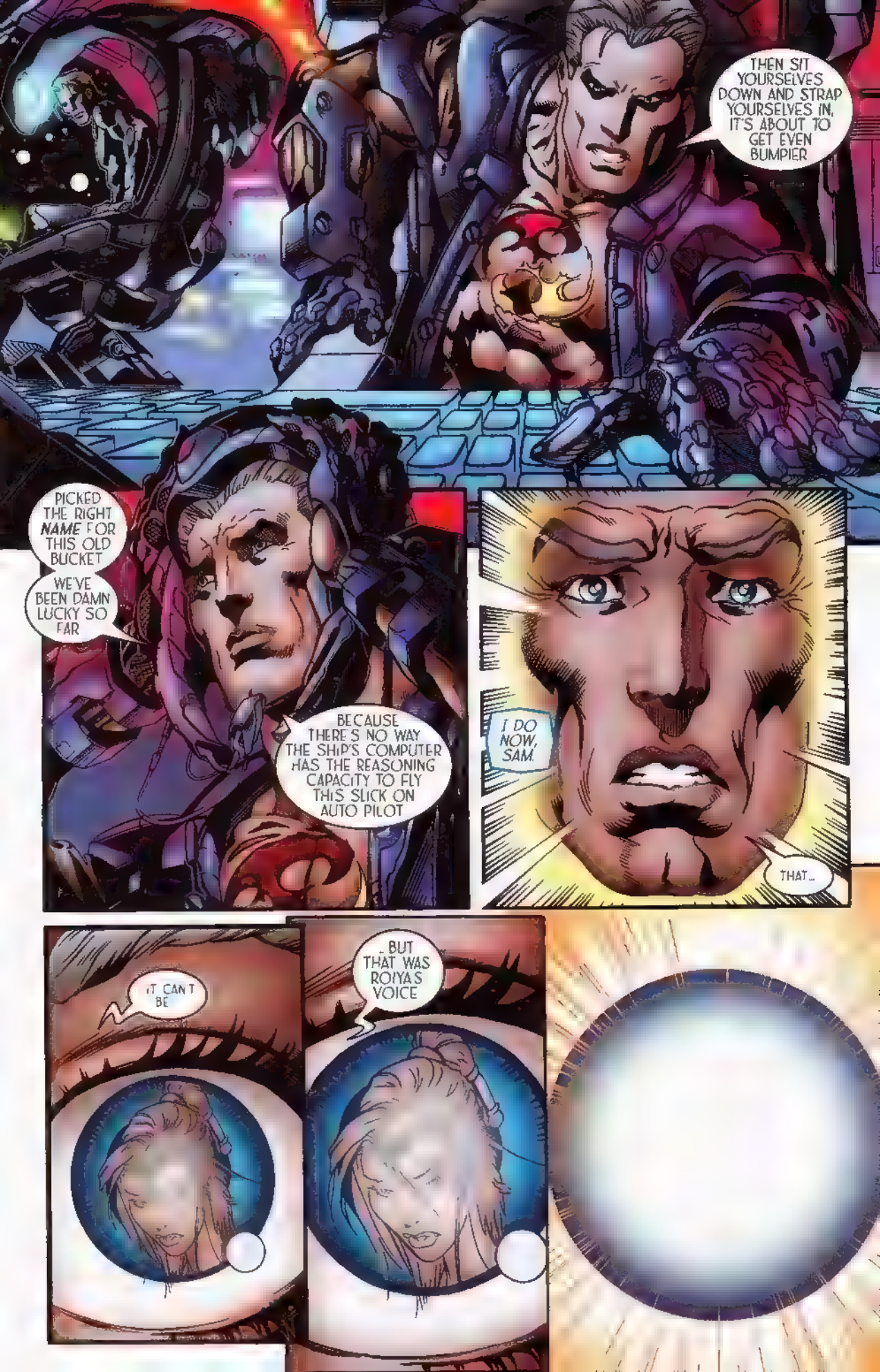
HER ENTIRE WORLD IS RIFE WITH MAGIC AND SHE NOW WIELDS A *GREAT* DEAL OF IT
COULD SHE REALLY POSE A THREAT?
WE WOULDN'T HAVE GATHERED HERE IF THERE WERE NO THREAT, AND SHE'S MERELY THE FIRST
OTHERS BEAR THE MARK
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. THE NEXT IS OBSCURE
LOCATING HIM IS PAINFUL TO ME
FIND HIM
I CAN MAKE THE ATTEMPT

ROIYA
..IM S SORRY YOU DEPENDED ON ME..
..AND I WASN'T THERE FOR YOU.
YOU ALWAYS HAD *MY* BACK. I DIDN'T HAVE YOURS WHEN IT COUNTED, AND YOU PAID THE PRICE.
SO YOU WIND UP *DEAD* AND I GET AWAY WITHOUT A SCRATCH EXCEPT FOR THIS DAMN THING BURNED INTO MY CHEST. SOME TIRED EXCUSE FOR A PARTNER I AM.
FORGIVE ME, ROIYA. FOR WHAT HAPPENED..

AND FOR ALL THE THINGS THAT NEVER HAPPENED
UHFF!
KRRRRRRR
EVASIVE ACTION.
THAT WAS A CANNON BLAST AND EVASIVE ACTION
WHAT THE HELL'S HAPPENING TO MY SHIP?!

PASSENGERS. OKAY..
...I NEVER GOT NAMES OUTTA YOU TWO IN ALL THE EXCITEMENT PLANETSIDE
JeMERIK MEER AND SHE'S...
...WELL, SHE'S THE ONE WHO KNEW ENOUGH ABOUT SPACECRAFT TO GET THIS ONE FLYING
YOU'VE BEEN UNCONSCIOUS EVER SINCE WE LEFT TANIPAL
I'M GLAD YOU'RE ALL RIGHT...um...
SAM Uh... YEAH, YOU TOO
WHAT DID YOU SAY YOUR NAME—
HANG ON!
KRROOM
AND WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, TELL ME WHO'S PILOTING THE BITTERLUCK NOW
MEER! WHAT'S GOING ON? WHO'S CHASING US?
LET'S SEE..

...THERE'S THE SAURIANS, I'M *REAL* SURE ABOUT THEM.
AND DEFINITELY THE SULTAN'S GUARDS.
PROBABLY EVEN SOME UNION CRUISERS BEFORE TOO LONG
YOU'VE GOT A TALENT FOR MAKING ENEMIES, SAM. WHO'S *CHASING* US...?
WHO *ISN'T?*


THEN SIT YOURSELVES DOWN AND STRAP YOURSELVES IN, IT'S ABOUT TO GET EVEN BUMPIER
PICKED THE RIGHT *NAME* FOR THIS OLD BUCKET
WE'VE BEEN DAMN LUCKY SO FAR
BECAUSE THERE'S NO WAY THE SHIP'S COMPUTER HAS THE REASONING CAPACITY TO FLY THIS SLICK ON AUTO PILOT
I DO NOW, SAM.
THAT...
IT CAN'T BE
...BUT THAT WAS ROIYA'S VOICE

EYAAH!!
WHAT HAPPENED, WHAT DID YOU *DO*?!
I DID NOTHING! HE'S SIMPLY *GONE*, I DON'T KNOW WHY
IT'S AS IF HE'S HIDDEN FROM US.
NOTHING REMAINS HIDDEN FROM US. THIS ONE BEARS PERSONAL INVESTIGATION.
HUNT HIM, TRENIN
ARE ALL OF THEM LOST TO US?
I DON'T BELIEVE SO. ONLY HIM.
I CAN SHOW YOU OTHERS

ETHAN.
..DON'T BLAME YOURSELF
BUT...I DIDN'T
GAAAHH

...I SWEAR I NEVER MEANT FOR THIS TO HAPPEN
BRON, I'M SORRY. LET ME...
YOU'VE DONE ENOUGH, CUR!
TAKE HIM!
BLOOD FOR BLOOD, WESTERN WHELP!
PLEASE...
THIS ISN'T WHAT I WANTED!
TREACHERY!
GUT THE BOY!
THE TOURNAMENT IS DISGRACED!

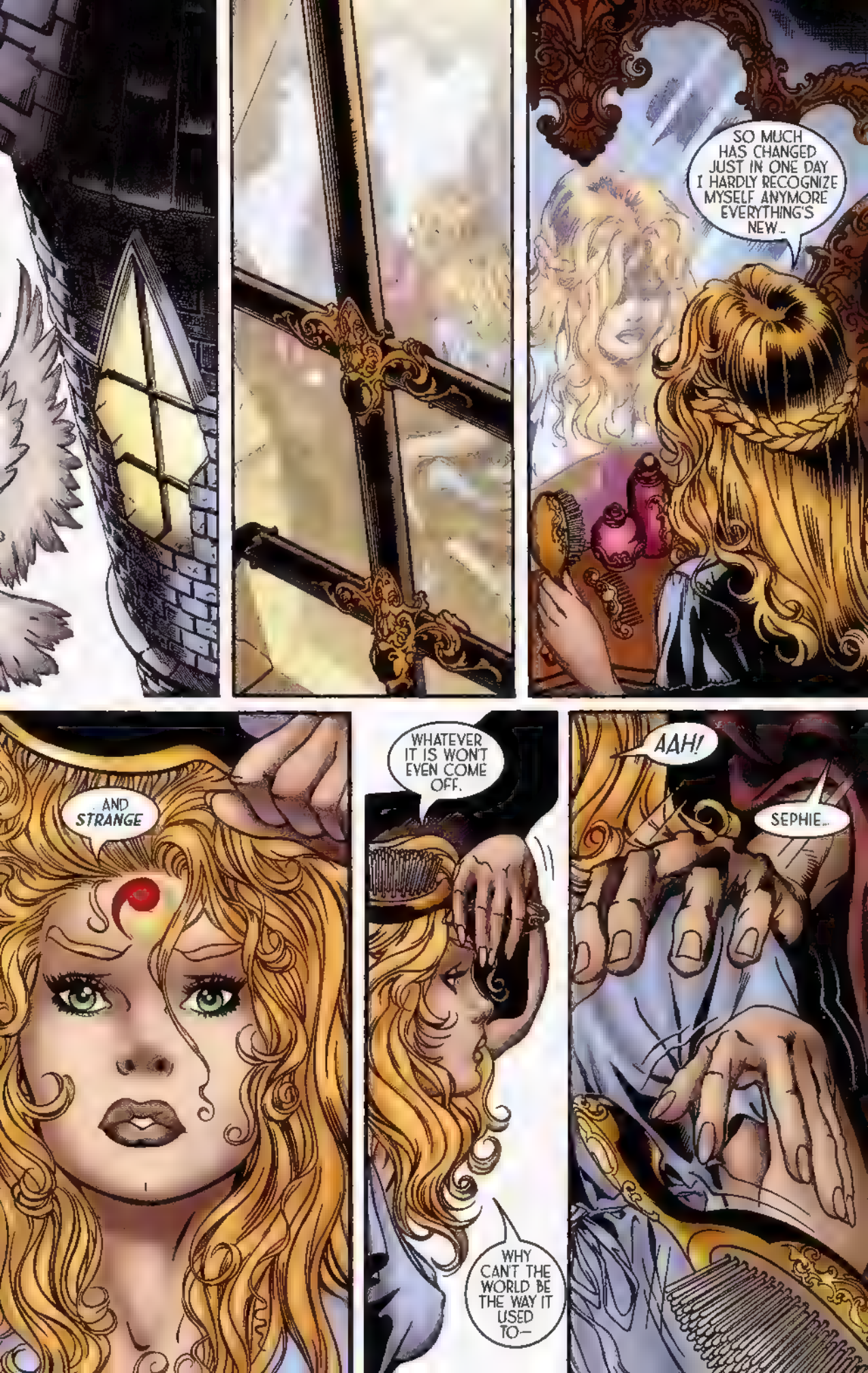
HMMMMMM
VANG
REAP WHAT YOU'VE SOWN, PRINCE! THE RAVENS WILL HAVE REVENGE!
IT WAS A MISTAKE! I DIDN'T INTEND TO SCAR HIM!
NOW'S NOT THE TIME FOR BATTLE, ETHAN
SKINK, WHAT HAVE I STARTED?
NOTHING YOU CAN STOP. THIS RIOT WILL SORT ITSELF OUT
..BUT YOU HAVE TO COME AWAY WHILE YOU STILL CAN
HURRY

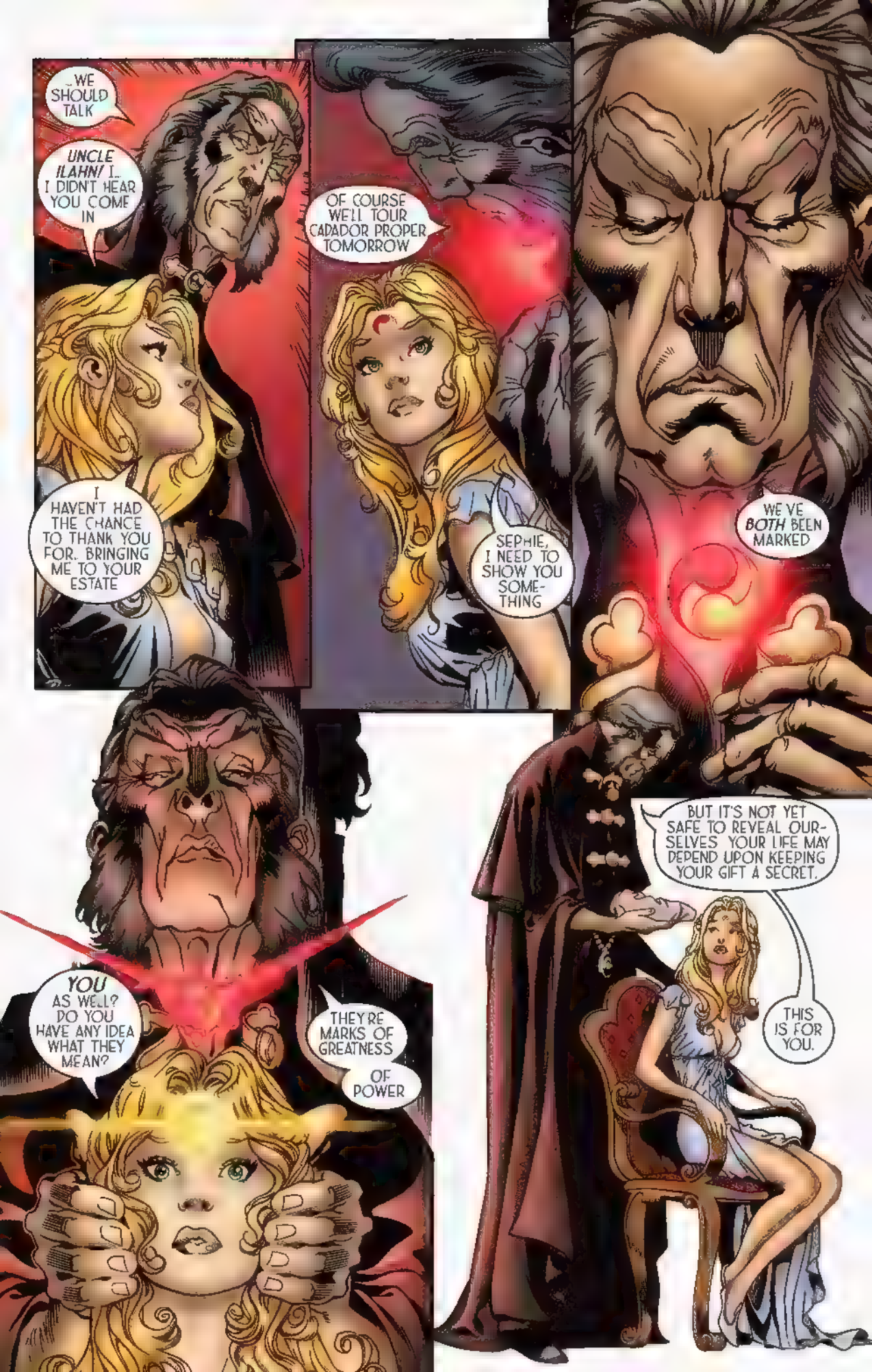
SKINK, I DREAMED ABOUT THIS DAY, HOW *GLORIOUS* EVERYTHING WOULD BE IT'S TURNED INTO A NIGHTMARE
IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT, ETHAN.
NOW HOSTILITIES BETWEEN THE DYNASTIES WILL FLARE AGAIN THERE MIGHT EVEN BE WAR
BECAUSE OF ME!
I THINK *THIS* PLAYED A PART IN WHAT HAPPENED, AND I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT IT IS OR WHERE IT CAME FROM.
ETHAN, *UNDERSTAND* THIS WASN'T ANYTHING YOU ASKED FOR
BUT WHAT'S DONE IS DONE, AND YOU MUST BE PREPARED FOR THE CONSEQUENCES
YOU MEAN ABOUT BRON? OR ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME..
SOMETHING MORE?

UHHK!
BRON..
I'LL HAVE YOUR LIFE FOR THIS, BOY!

IT APPEARS HE'LL BE ELIMINATED EVEN BEFORE HE CAN BECOME A CONCERN
I RATHER DOUBT THEY'RE SO EASILY DESTROYED BUT THAT'S MERELY A GUESS.
PERHAPS YOUR RATHER TALKATIVE COMPANION WOULD LIKE TO SHARE HIS THOUGHTS ON THE MATTER
NO?
HOW UNUSUAL
..THERE ARE TWO
YOU WASTE YOUR EFFORT ATTEMPTING TO BAIT HIM
WHO IS THE NEXT ONE?
NO, NOT ONE..

SOON NOW
SOON


SO MUCH HAS CHANGED JUST IN ONE DAY I HARDLY RECOGNIZE MYSELF ANYMORE EVERYTHING'S NEW..
AND STRANGE
WHATEVER IT IS WON'T EVEN COME OFF.
WHY CAN'T THE WORLD BE THE WAY IT USED TO—
AAH!
SEPHIE...


...WE SHOULD TALK
UNCLE ILAHN! I... I DIDN'T HEAR YOU COME IN
I HAVEN'T HAD THE CHANCE TO THANK YOU FOR.. BRINGING ME TO YOUR ESTATE
OF COURSE WE'LL TOUR CAPADOR PROPER TOMORROW
SEPHIE, I NEED TO SHOW YOU SOME-THING
WE'VE BOTH BEEN MARKED
BUT IT'S NOT YET SAFE TO REVEAL OUR-SELVES YOUR LIFE MAY DEPEND UPON KEEPING YOUR GIFT A SECRET.
THIS IS FOR YOU.
YOU AS WELL? DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT THEY MEAN?
THEY'RE MARKS OF GREATNESS
OF POWER

THANK YOU, IT'S... PRETTY
THE SORT OF THING YOUR MOTHER WOULD'VE WORN, I THINK. I WANT YOU TO USE IT TO *HIDE* THE MARK YOU BEAR
IF PEOPLE KNEW WHAT WE COULD DO
...WELL, IT'S JUST BETTER THEY *DON'T*
REMEMBER, SEPHIE, OUR SECRET A *FAMILY* SECRET
I UNDERSTAND UNCLE ILAHN
GOOD NIGHT

HOW DID HE DO THIS?
AND DOES IT MEAN I CAN DO IT TOO?
I CAN'T BE A DESTROYER, NOT WHEN THE PEOPLE OF MERIDIAN HAVE ALWAYS BEEN
BUILDERS
SOON
Oh YES

THERE ARE OTHERS
WE'VE SEEN ENOUGH FOR NOW
THE MARKS ALL OF THEM BEAR, EQUAL FORCES IN OPPOSITION. THEY MIRROR OUR OWN.
YET WE HAVE NO INKLING AS TO HOW OR WHY THESE SIGILS WERE GRANTED TO THEM. I FIND THAT *MOST* DISTURBING.
I STILL DON'T SEE HOW ANY OF THEM CAN TRULY BE A DANGER
NOT TO *US*.
OF COURSE THEY'RE A DANGER, YOU LITTLE FOOL!
THEY'RE WILDCARDS TO THE ORDER WE'VE BUILT!
IT'S NOT UNTHINKABLE THAT WE COULD BE CHALLENGED. PERHAPS OUR EFFORTS SHOULD BE POOLED IN ADDRESSING THESE NEWCOMERS
Oh, I IMAGINE WE'LL BE ABLE TO DEAL WITH THEM IN OUR OWN FASHION. AS INVITING AS YOUR OFFER IS...
...I MUST DECLINE
I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT.
I'M SURE YOU'RE NOT PLANNING TO USE THE SITUATION TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

PERISH THE THOUGHT.
THERE'S BEEN *BALANCE* BETWEEN OUR HOUSES FOR SUCH A LONG TIME. IT WOULDN'T DO TO UPSET IT
HOW TRAGIC THAT WOULD BE
I'D *HATE* FOR YOU AND I TO COME TO BLOWS AGAIN.
THEN WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER PERFECTLY
I BELIEVE WE'RE FINISHED HERE
FOR THE MOMENT NOW WE WAIT.
AND WE WATCH

HELLO, MY LOVE
DEAREST
..IT PAINS MY HEART TO SEE YOU SO TROUBLED
WE DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW ANY OF THESE SIGIL-BEARERS CAME TO BE AND THERE ARE *MORE* THAN JUST THESE FEW
I'M WORRIED ABOUT WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS
THE HOUSES HAVE LANGUISHED FOR TOO LONG THIS WILL AWAKEN THEM, AND THERE WILL BE STRIFE. PERHAPS A *RENEWAL*.
AND *US*? WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR US?

I DON'T KNOW
A THING LIKE THIS HAS NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE AFTER THIS..
..NOTHING'S EVER GOING TO BE THE SAME

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The CrossGen Universe exploded when the Sigil-Bearers were graced with their marks of power – but the worlds of CrossGen existed long before. **Chronicles** tells tales of pasts both distant and recent, detailing rich histories and hinting at mysterious futures...

AVALON IS ACTUALLY TWO WORLDS: one, a medieval façade which maintains a connection with the planet's feudal past; the other, the fabulous technology hidden beneath that veneer. Science has enabled the creation of everything from hovercraft battleships that skim over the sea's surface, to the diversity of life-forms known as the Lesser Races that has been spawned through genetic manipulation.

Two great dynasties have ruled Avalon for centuries: the Herons of the West and the Ravens of the East. Their long-standing hatreds run deep, and their kingdoms warred for generations until a fragile truce was forged. This is that story.

The peace ultimately was shattered, however, by the actions of a young Heron prince named Ethan. After being branded with a sigil whose power he could neither control nor understand, Ethan accidentally scarred the Raven heir to the throne, Bron, during the annual tournament of ritual combat that had replaced open warfare.

Now East and West once again stoke the fires of war. One of the first casualties of the conflict was Ethan's eldest brother, Artor, slain by Bron. Ethan, swearing vengeance, has returned to Eastern shores accompanied by his sidekick, Skink...

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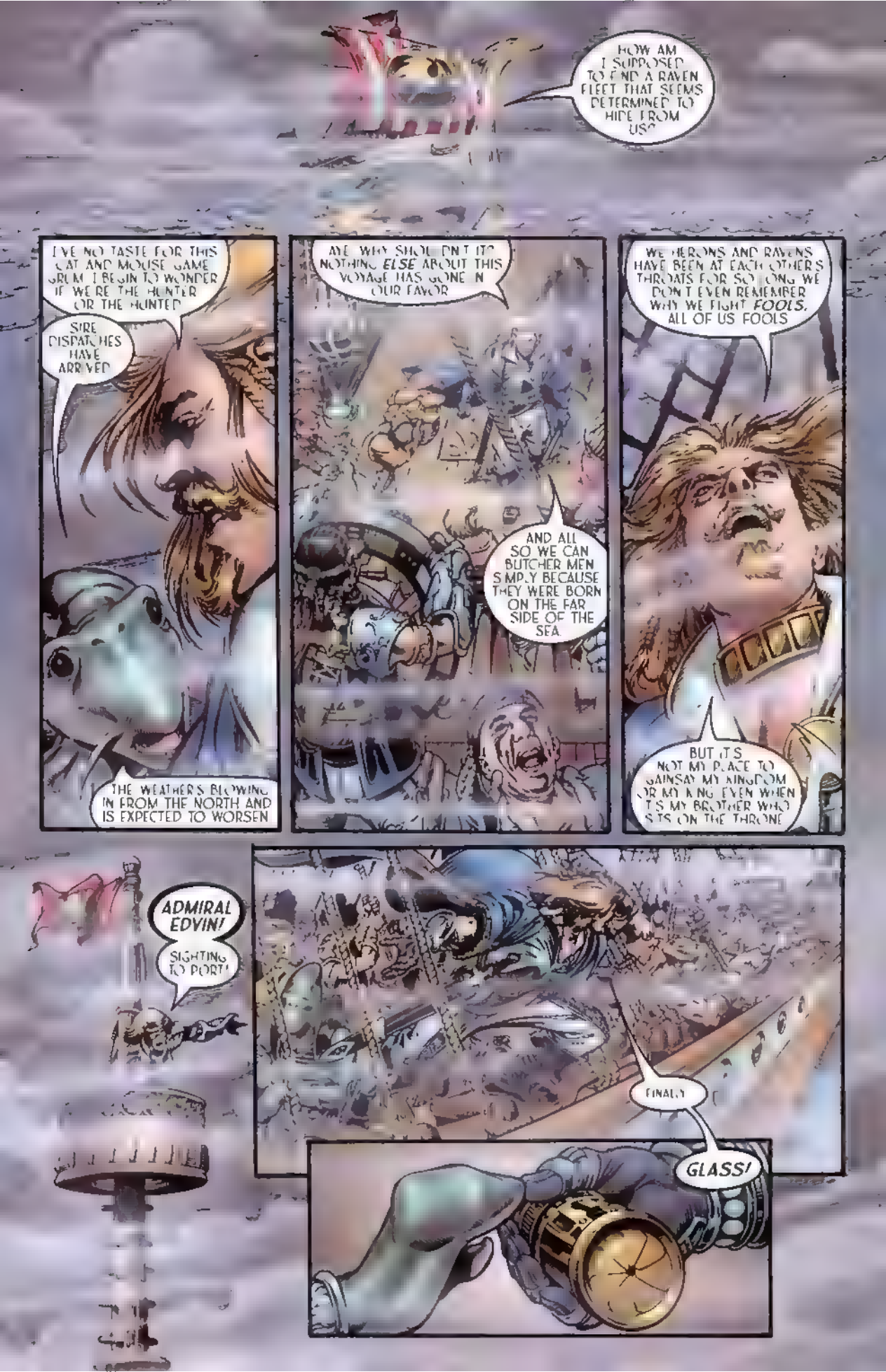
IT'S GETTING COLDER
THE IRONY'S NOT LOST ON ME, YOU KNOW
MY BLADE'S DESIGN BEING BASED ON THE SWORD OF MY ANCESTOR EDVIN

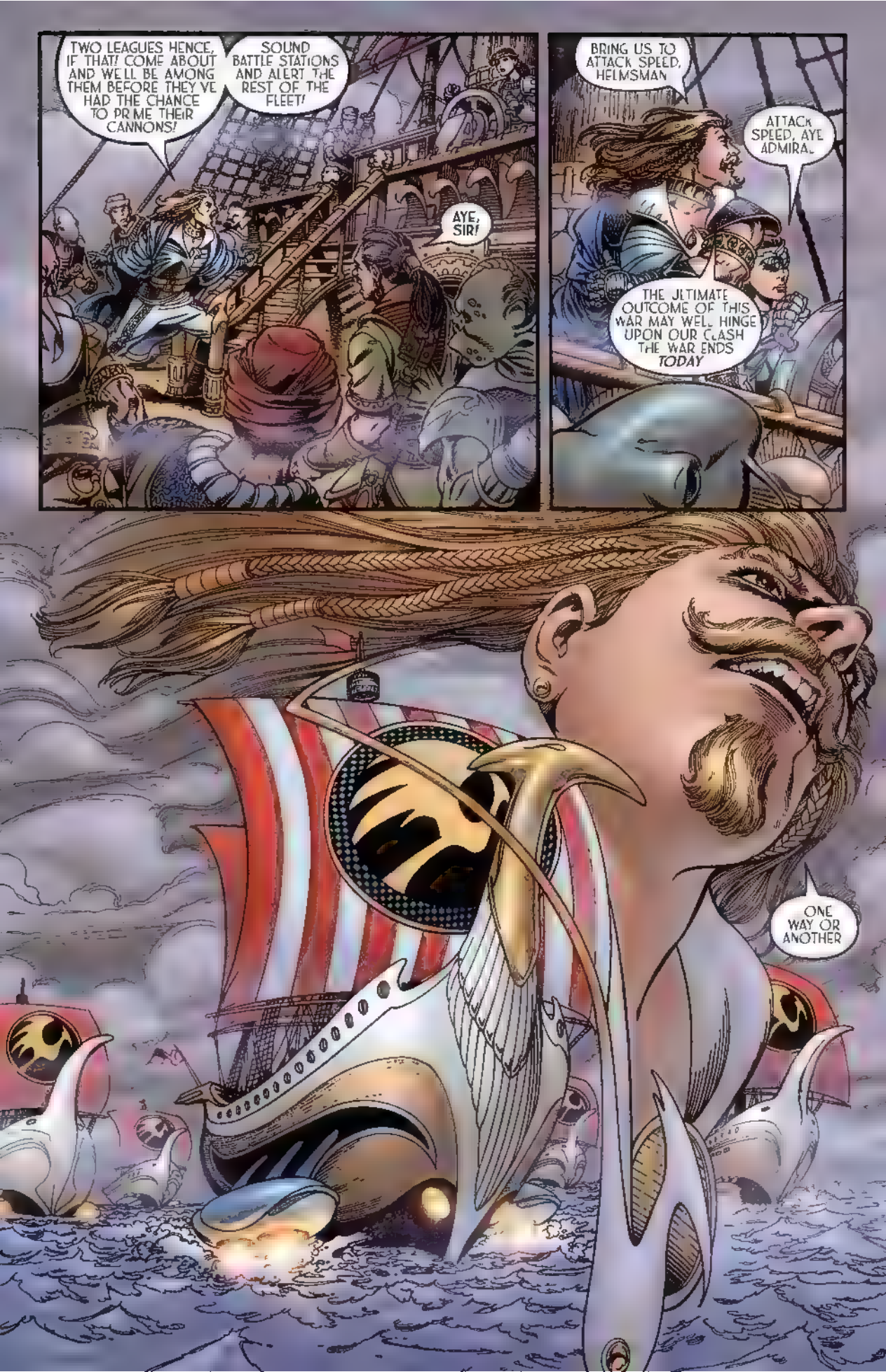
HE PUSHED THE HERONS AND RAVENS TOWARD PEACE MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO AND NOW WE'RE AT WAR AGAIN
WHOKT
BECAUSE OF *ME*
ETHAN, SOMETIMES YOUR DESTINY CHOOSES *YOU*, RATHER THAN YOU CHOOSING IT. DON'T BLAME YOURSELF FOR THINGS BEYOND YOUR CONTROL
LIKE THE WAR?
LIKE MY BROTHER'S MURDER?
THERE'S NO NEED TO SPARE MY FEELINGS, SKINK. WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER TOO LONG
THE TRUTH IS NONE OF THIS WOULD'VE HAPPENED IF *I* HADN'T CAUSED IT.
IF I HADN'T BEEN BRANDED W TH THIS SIGI

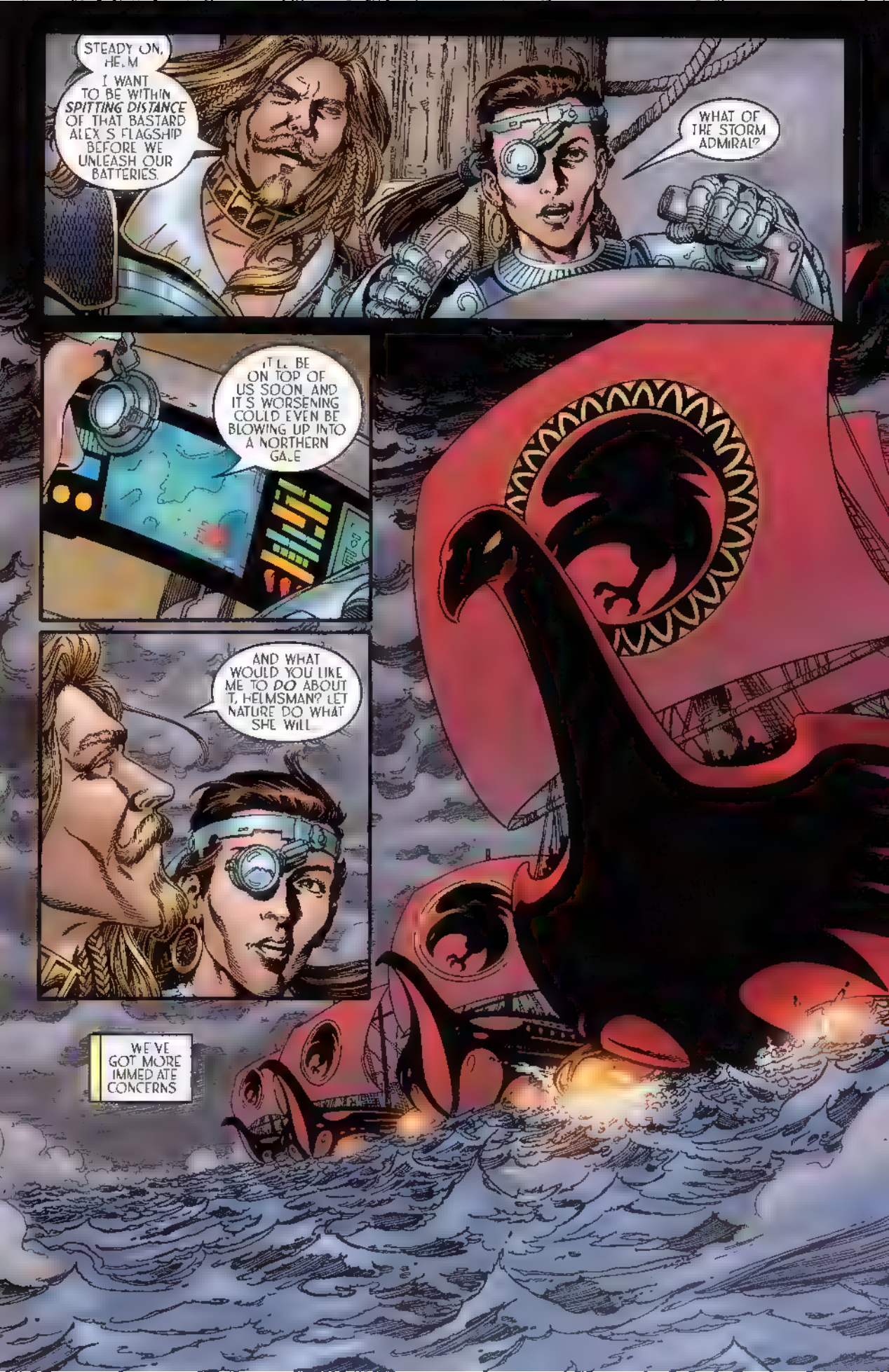
MOST PEOPLE CELEBRATE ON THEIR BIRTHDAYS
I SET TWO KINGDOMS TO WAR
THEY FORGED ME THE SWORD OF THE MAN WHO BROUGHT THE HERON RAVEN WAR TO AN END
AND I HAVE EVERY INTENTION OF USING IT TO KILL A RAVEN PRINCE
NO ONE WOULD ARGUE YOUR VOW TO AVENGE ARTOR'S DEATH, ETHAN. IT'S A MATTER OF HONOR
YOUR FATHER THOUGHT IT A GOOD PORTENT THAT YOU WERE BORN ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF EDVIN BRINGING ABOUT THE WAR'S END
I KNOW. FATHER ALWAYS HELD UP EDVIN AS AN IDEAL TO ME
BUT I DON'T THINK I'VE DONE A VERY GOOD JOB OF LIVING UP TO HIS LEGACY
EDVIN WAS ADMIRAL OF THE HERON FLEET
LOYAL BROTHER TO THE KING
THE PEACE MAKER

STEADY
THEY'RE HERE
HIDING SOMEWHERE IN THIS DAMNED BLANKET
THOUGH IF I CAN'T FIND MY HAND IN FRONT OF MY FACE


HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO FIND A RAVEN FLEET THAT SEEMS DETERMINED TO HIDE FROM US?
I'VE NO TASTE FOR THIS CAT AND MOUSE GAME GRUM. I BEGIN TO WONDER IF WE'RE THE HUNTER OR THE HUNTED.
SIRE, DISPATCHES HAVE ARRIVED.
THE WEATHER'S BLOWING IN FROM THE NORTH AND IS EXPECTED TO WORSEN.
AYE. WHY SHOULDN'T IT? NOTHING ELSE ABOUT THIS VOYAGE HAS GONE IN OUR FAVOR.
AND ALL SO WE CAN BUTCHER MEN SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY WERE BORN ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE SEA.
WE HERONS AND RAVENS HAVE BEEN AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS FOR SO LONG WE DON'T EVEN REMEMBER WHY WE FIGHT. FOOLS. ALL OF US FOOLS.
BUT IT'S NOT MY PLACE TO GAINSAY MY KINGDOM OR MY KING. EVEN WHEN IT'S MY BROTHER WHO SITS ON THE THRONE.
ADMIRAL EDVIN!
SIGHTING TO PORT!
FINALLY.
GLASS!

COME, DAMN YOU, SHOW YOURSELVES
AYE.
...IT'S THEM


TWO LEAGUES HENCE, IF THAT COME ABOUT AND WE'LL BE AMONG THEM BEFORE THEY'VE HAD THE CHANCE TO PRIME THEIR CANNONS!
SOUND BATTLE STATIONS AND ALERT THE REST OF THE FLEET!
AYE, SIR!
BRING US TO ATTACK SPEED, HELMSMAN
ATTACK SPEED, AYE ADMIRAL
THE ULTIMATE OUTCOME OF THIS WAR MAY WELL HINGE UPON OUR CLASH THE WAR ENDS *TODAY*
ONE WAY OR ANOTHER


STEADY ON, HE.M
I WANT TO BE WITHIN *SPITTING DISTANCE* OF THAT BASTARD ALEX S FLAGSHIP BEFORE WE UNLEASH OUR BATTERIES.
WHAT OF THE STORM ADMIRAL?
IT L. BE ON TOP OF US SOON. AND IT S WORSENING COULD EVEN BE BLOWING UP INTO A NORTHERN GA.E
AND WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO *DO* ABOUT T, HELMSMAN? LET NATURE DO WHAT SHE WILL.
WE VE GOT MORE IMMED ATE CONCERNS

WOOMPF
ALEX SENDS US HIS BEST
APPARENTLY HE'S A BIT MORE PREPARED THAN I GAVE HIM CREDIT FOR *AND* A BETTER SHOT
TELL THE GUNNERS TO PRESENT, BUT FIRE ONLY ON MY COMMAND
GUNNERS PRESENT!
WAIT
WAIT
ADMIRAL, WE'RE ON A COLLISION COURSE
HARD-A-PORT WHEN I GIVE THE ORDER
WAIT
HARD-A-PORT!
FIRE!

FIRE! ALL BATTERIES FIRE!

CHUK CHUK CHUK

A HIT! ONE BLACK WING CLIPPED!

EAT FIRE, RAVEN SCUM!

ONLY THE FIRST BLOW GENTLEMEN THEY'LL TRY TO CHASE US DOWN AND LOOSE A BROADSIDE. COME ABOUT AND TELL THE GUN DECKS TO RELOAD

HEEL US OVER! STARBOARD GUNS RELOAD!

LOOK SMART! LOAD THAT SALVO BEFORE THE REST OF THE FLEET TAKES ALL THE GLORY!

Oh, no

ADMIRAL THEY'RE NOT LAYING OVER!

THEY MEAN TO *RAM* US!

BRACE FOR IMPACT!

GNF!

AAAH!!

OUR SHIP WON'T FLOAT UNDER US

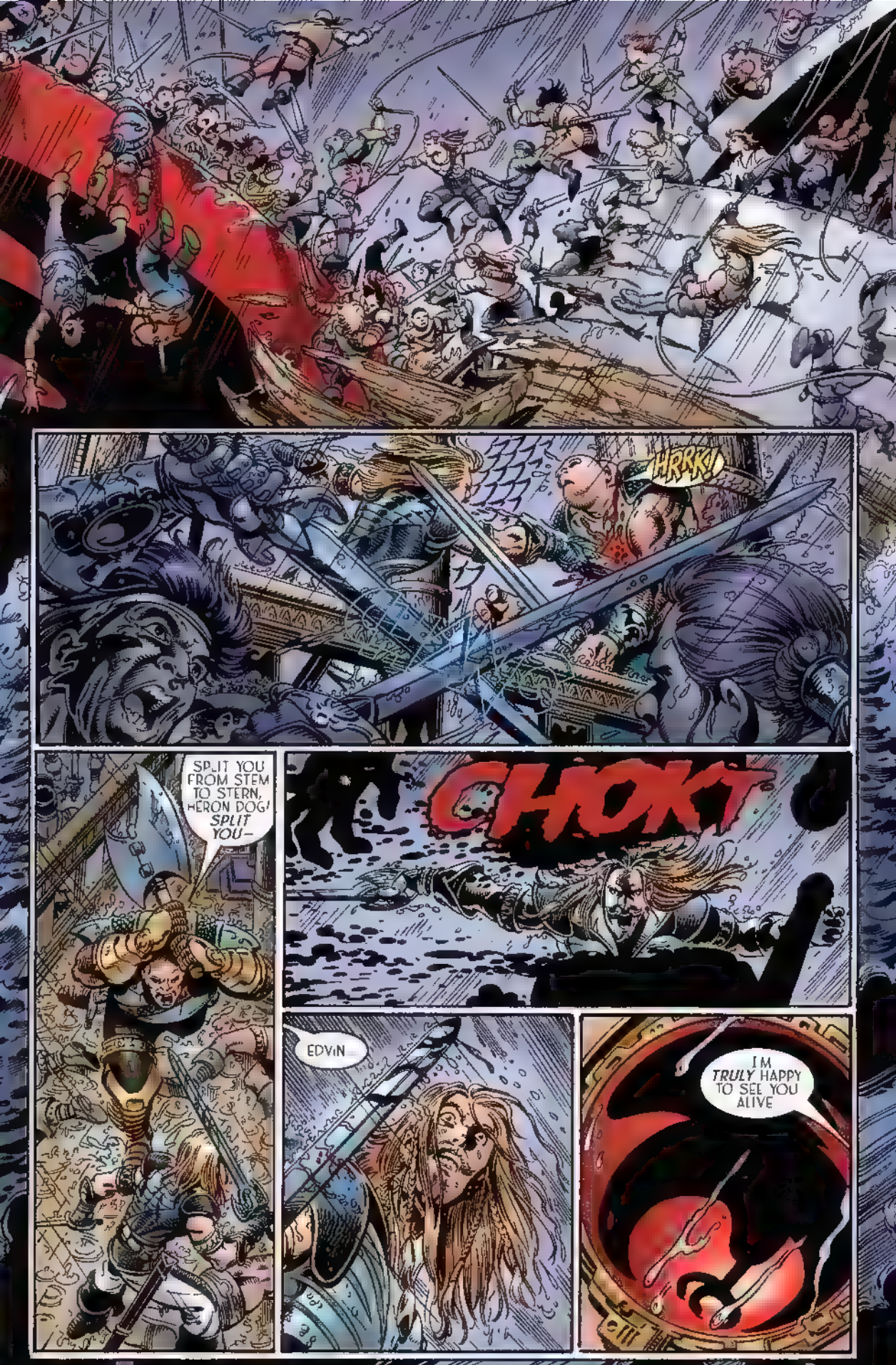
THEN WE TAKE THEIRS

UNLESS ANYONE WANTS TO SWIM HOME WITH ME, MATES?

AYE!

KRAK

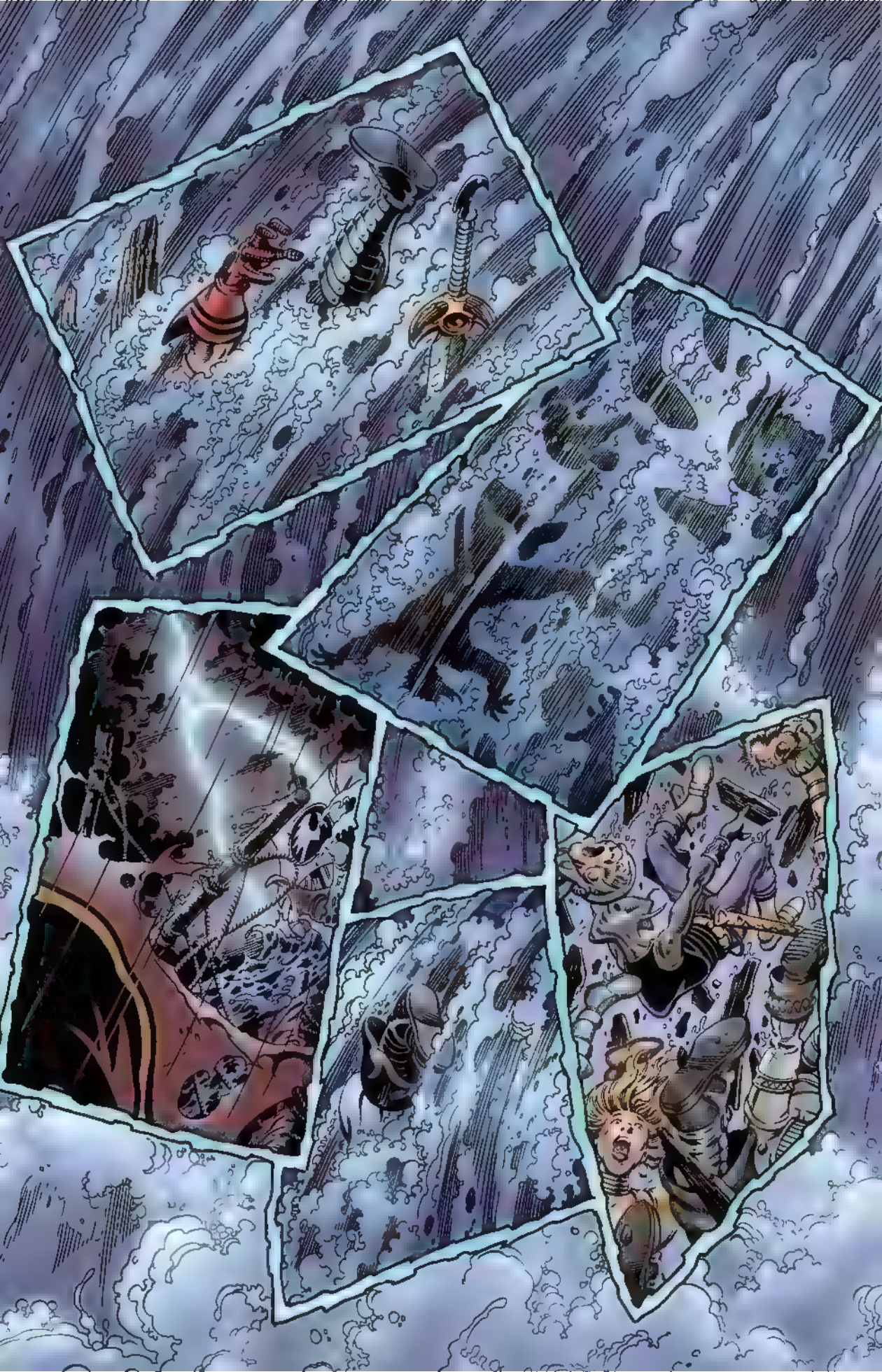
FOR KING AND KINGDOM!


HRRK!
SPLIT YOU FROM STEM TO STERN, HERON DOG! SPLIT YOU–
CHOK!
EDVIN...
I'M TRULY HAPPY TO SEE YOU ALIVE

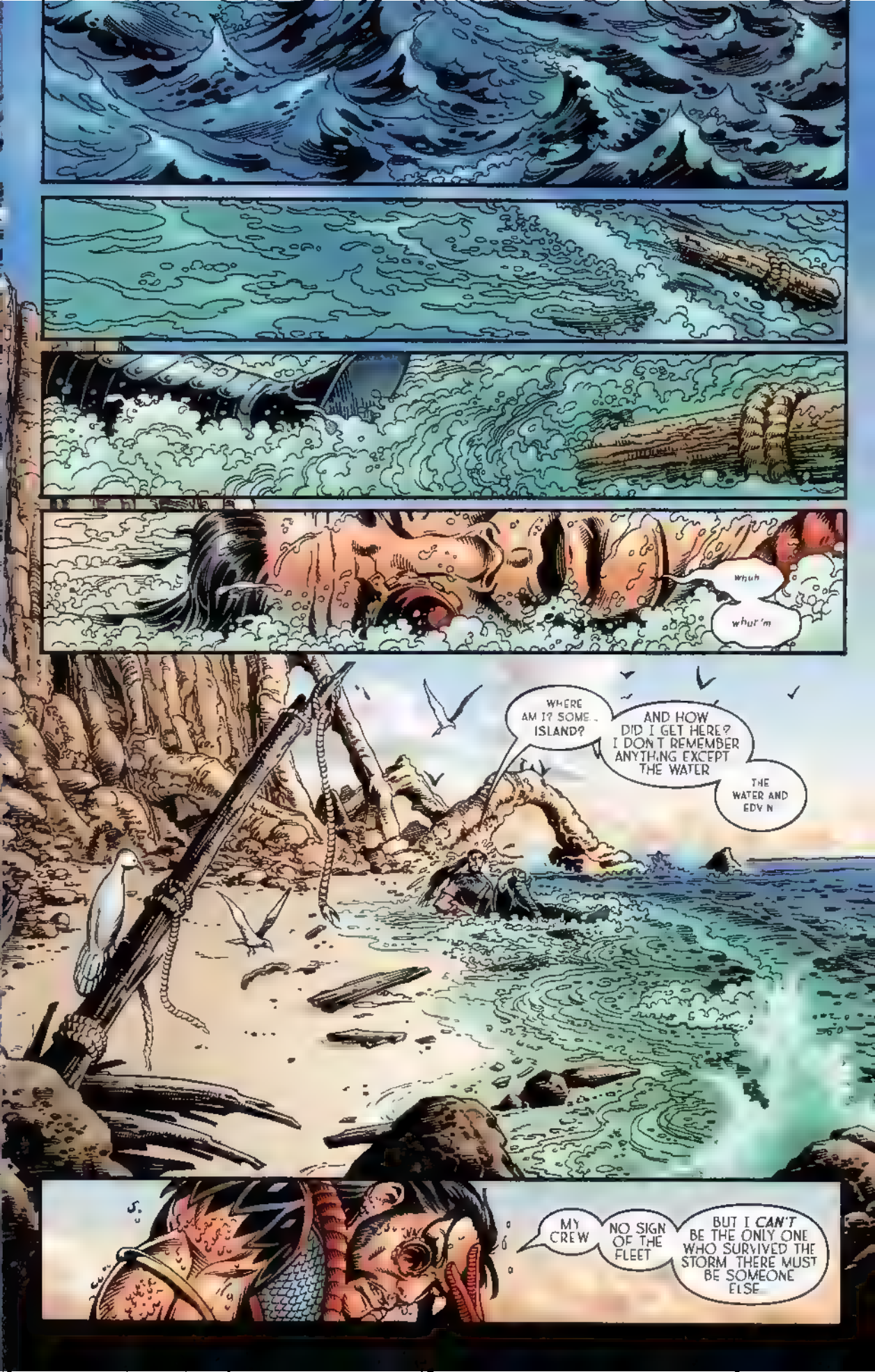
I WAS AFRAID YOU'D TOPPLE OFF THAT SORRY SCOW'S DECK AND INTO THE SEA DROWNING'S NO WAY FOR YOU TO DIE
GUTTING YOU MYSELF WILL BE SO MUCH MORE SATISFYING
HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE FACED ONE ANOTHER, EDYN?
FOUR?
FIVE?
FIVE
FIVE THEN
BUT ALWAYS WITH THE SEA BETWEEN US. OUR OWN DECKS UNDER OUR FEET. NEVER LIKE THIS.
NEVER LIKE THIS

CLANK
SLAM
WHEE

HRG
HERE, ALEXI! WE'LL FINISH THIS EVEN IF I HAVE TO LASH MYSELF TO
GNF?!
SPISH
HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THIS STORM, KEDVIN?
IT'S GOING TO TAKE US ALL, YOU KNOW
BUT I'LL TAKE YOU FIRST.



SPUSH
HHH
HHH
HHH
I BEAT HIM
I FINALLY BEAT HIM! ROT YOUR BONES, EDVIN, I—
DROWNING IS A TERRIBLE FATE, ISN'T IT YOU RAVEN SON OF A—
RAWAA!
UHKK


whuh
whut'm
WHERE AM I? SOME... ISLAND?
AND HOW DID I GET HERE? I DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING EXCEPT THE WATER
THE WATER AND EDVIN
MY CREW
NO SIGN OF THE FLEET
BUT I *CAN'T* BE THE ONLY ONE WHO SURVIVED THE STORM. THERE MUST BE SOMEONE ELSE.

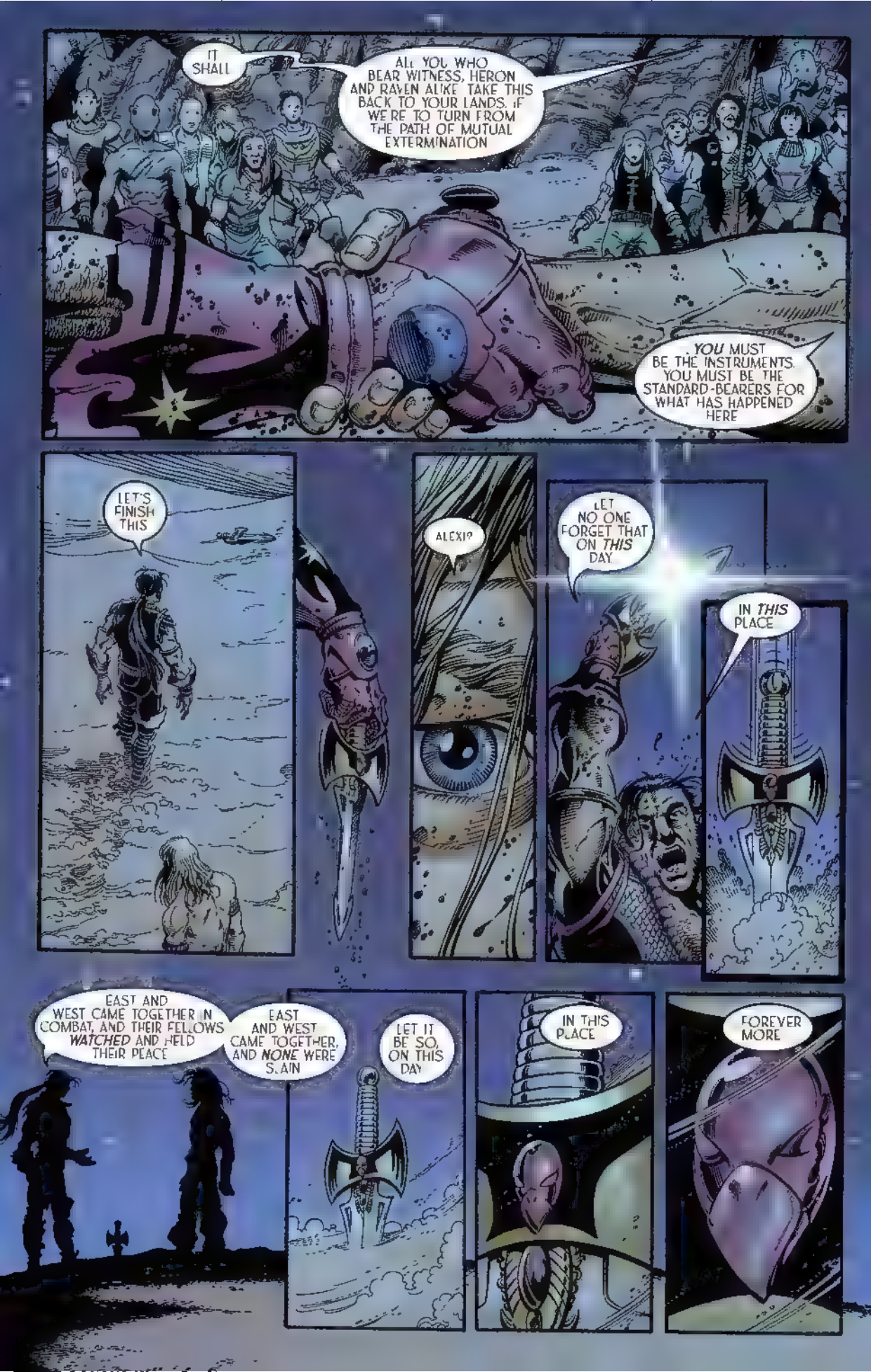
SOMEWHERE
NO
NO, IT CAN'T BE
IT CAN'T BE!
HE'S ALIVE!
WHAT MUST I DO TO BE FREE OF YOU?!
HOW MANY TIMES
MUST I KILL YOU?!

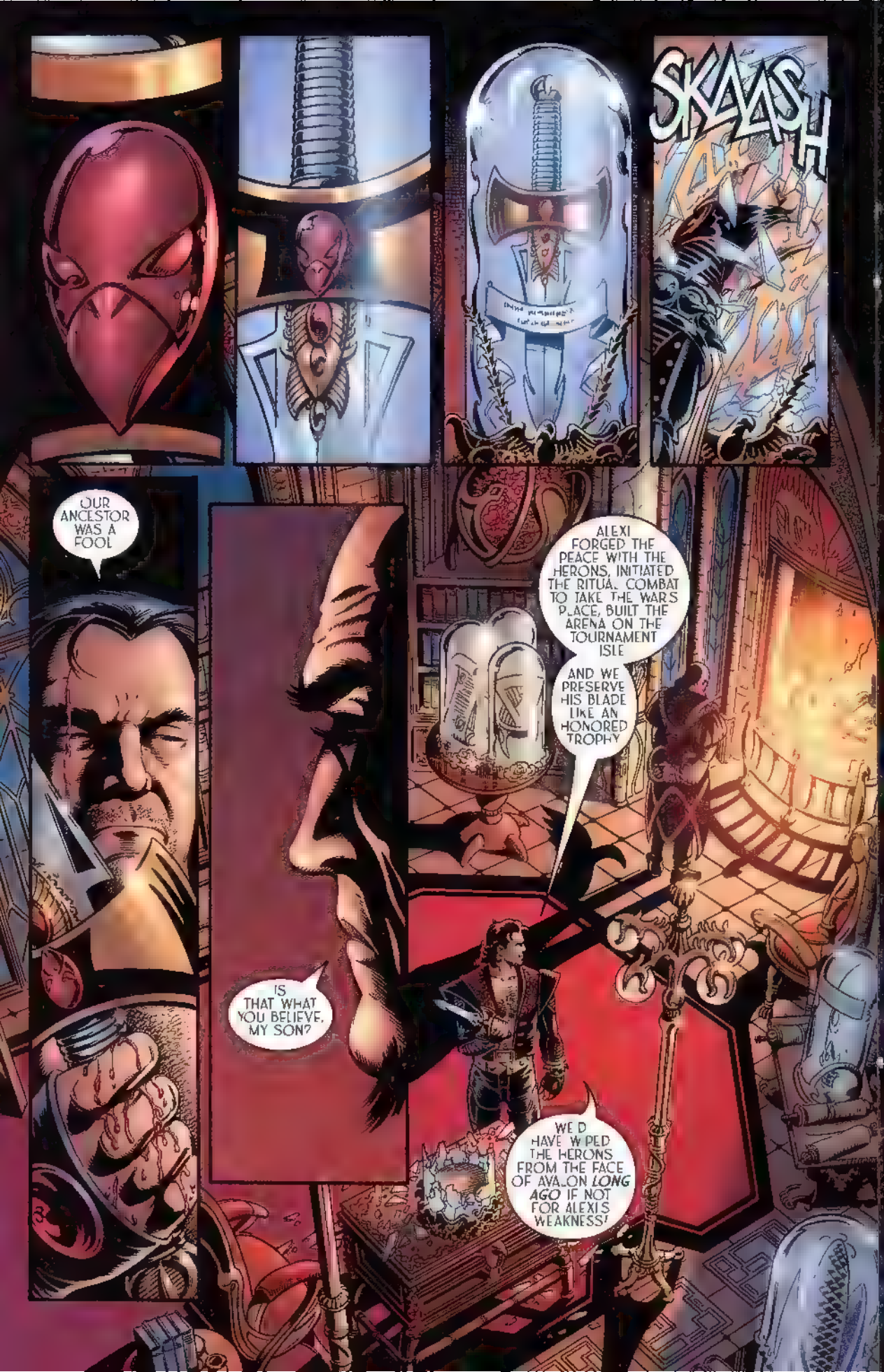
NNH!
GLLK!
UMF!
A LITTLE CLOSER ALEX!
LET'S SEE IF I LIKE YOU BETTER WITH YOUR BRAINS ON THE OUTSIDE!
DO YOU UNDERSTAND EDVIN? IT'S DOWN TO US. THE BATTLE OF ENTIRE FLEETS, THE BALANCE OF THE WAR
REDUCED TO TWO SURVIVORS
AG!
PWHH!
ONE SURVIVOR
AGF!

WHFF!
ADMIRAL?
ADMIRAL EDVIN?
GAAH!
GRUM?
SHOULDN'T WE HELP THE ADMIRAL?
NO
..NO, I DON'T THINK SO
NGF!
AGH!

NNH
NH
NH
GH
TH S

THIS CAN'T
GO ON
Nuh.
NO
IT CAN'T
HOW LONG
HAVE WE BEEN TRYING TO K... EACH OTHER?
AND FOR WHAT?
I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER AND I WILL JUST GO ON
AND ON.
AND ON
SO FUTILE
IT HAS TO END
THEN LET THE END
BEGIN HERE
LET PEACE BEGIN WITH US.


IT SHALL
ALL YOU WHO BEAR WITNESS, HERON AND RAVEN ALIKE TAKE THIS BACK TO YOUR LANDS. IF WE'RE TO TURN FROM THE PATH OF MUTUAL EXTERMINATION
YOU MUST BE THE INSTRUMENTS. YOU MUST BE THE STANDARD-BEARERS FOR WHAT HAS HAPPENED HERE
LET'S FINISH THIS
ALEXI?
LET NO ONE FORGET THAT ON THIS DAY
IN THIS PLACE
EAST AND WEST CAME TOGETHER IN COMBAT, AND THEIR FELLOWS WATCHED AND HELD THEIR PEACE
EAST AND WEST CAME TOGETHER, AND NONE WERE SLAIN
LET IT BE SO, ON THIS DAY
IN THIS PLACE
FOREVER MORE


SKAAASH
OUR ANCESTOR WAS A FOOL
IS THAT WHAT YOU BELIEVE, MY SON?
ALEXI FORGED THE PEACE WITH THE HERONS, INITIATED THE RITUAL COMBAT TO TAKE THE WARS PLACE, BUILT THE ARENA ON THE TOURNAMENT ISLE
AND WE PRESERVE HIS BLADE LIKE AN HONORED TROPHY
WE'D HAVE WIPED THE HERONS FROM THE FACE OF AVALON *LONG AGO* IF NOT FOR ALEXIS WEAKNESS!

PERHAPS WHAT YOU DEEM WEAKNESS WAS NECESSITY A WAY TO PRESERVE A KINGDOM WHOSE RESOURCES HAD BEEN EXHAUSTED BY DECADE UPON DECADE OF WAR
WHILE THE TRUCE HELD, OUR KINGDOM TENDED ITS WOUNDS. WE GREW STRONG AND NOW WE MAKE WAR AGAIN
IS IT TRULY EDVIN'S PEACE THAT VEXES YOU, BRON? OR IS IT PERHAPS THE SCAR YOU BEAR?
THE WESTERN WHELP WILL PAY FOR HIS TREACHERY!
I... PUT THIS BLADE TO ITS PROPER USE FATHER, AND OPEN ETHAN'S THROAT AS I DID HIS BROTHER'S!
BRON, YOU ARE MY ELDEST. YOU ARE TO FOLLOW ME TO THE THRONE ONE DAY
IF YOU LEARN TO CONTROL YOURSELF. IF YOU MEAN TO BE KING, YOU MUST BE MASTER OF YOUR ANGER. NOT LET IT MASTER YOU
YOUR TEMPER DOES NOT BEFIT ONE OF RAVEN NOBLE BLOOD AND IT WILL NOT SIT WELL ON THE HEAD THAT WEARS THE CROWN
I ADVISE YOU TO THINK ON THESE THINGS MY SON
HAVE A SERVANT REMOVE THE MESS YOU MADE
BUT KNOW THERE WON'T ALWAYS BE SOMEONE TO CLEAN UP AFTER YOU
YES, FATHER
KEEP LOOKING DOWN YOUR NOSE AT ME OLD MAN
YOU'LL NEVER SEE ME BEHIND YOU

EVEN IF I MUST *TAKE* THE THRONE I WILL BE MINE
AND SO WILL ETHAN'S HEAD

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CHRONICLES
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The CrossGen Universe exploded when the Sigil-Bearers were graced with their marks of power – but the worlds of CrossGen existed long before. **Chronicles** tells tales of pasts both distant and recent, detailing rich histories and hinting at mysterious futures...

LONG AGO

In the land of Demetria, a cataclysm destroyed the original civilization, scattering the survivors across the now-toxic surface of the planet. The same event also propelled large chunks of ground into the sky to form floating islands made buoyant by the same ore responsible for the cataclysm. Over time, these wild sky islands were tamed and linked by ships whose wood came from trees whose roots had touched the ore.

Trade between islands began as simple barter and evolved into a web of contracts, influence, and back-room dealings between independent city states governed by Ministers. One island, Cadador, controls all ore contracts and most of the shipping between islands, making it the most powerful of the city-states. To succeed on Demetria is literally to rise: the riskiest jobs are on the surface and most people strive to live in comfort on one of the sky islands, far away from the blighted areas.

Cadador's sister island, Meridian, is the island of shipbuilders and Sephie, the Minister of Meridian since the death of her father Turos. Both Sephie and her uncle Ilahn, the Minister of Cadador, bear the mysterious Sigil, which grants them amazing abilities. Sephie has the power to renew; Ilahn, to destroy.

Sephie and Ilahn are at odds. Sephie is on a quest to gather enough allies to defy Ilahn's absolute control of commerce; Ilahn is out to destroy both Meridian and Sephie.

But long before Sephie, Ilahn fought her father for another prize...

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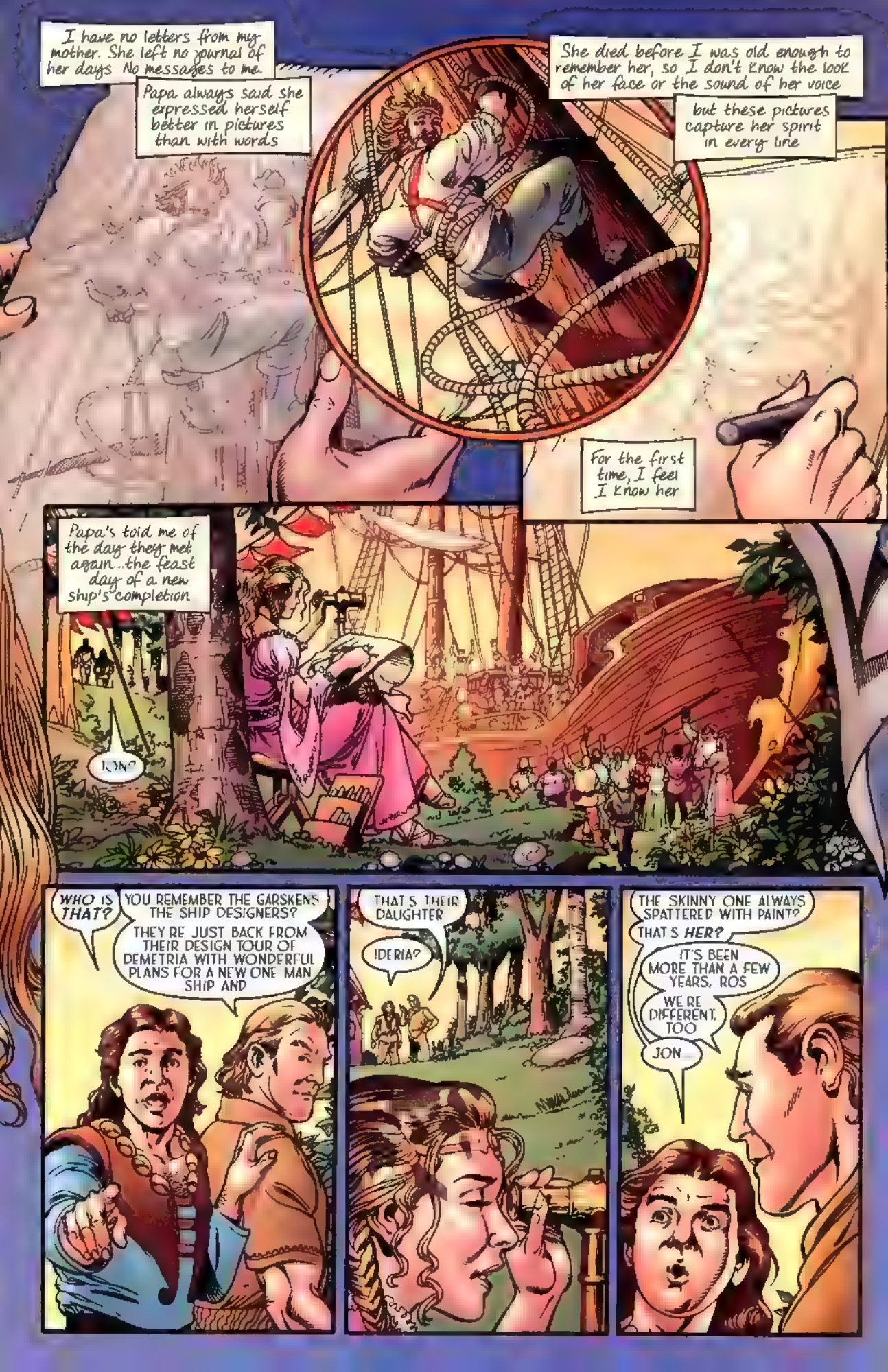
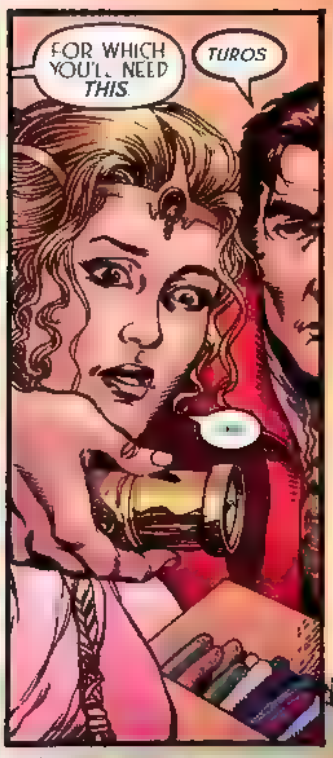

I have no letters from my mother. She left no journal of her days No messages to me.
Papa always said she expressed herself better in pictures than with words
She died before I was old enough to remember her, so I don't know the look of her face or the sound of her voice
but these pictures capture her spirit in every line
For the first time, I feel I know her
Papa's told me of the day they met again...the feast day of a new ship's completion
JON?
WHO IS THAT?
YOU REMEMBER THE GARSKENS THE SHIP DESIGNERS?
THEY'RE JUST BACK FROM THEIR DESIGN TOUR OF DEMETRIA WITH WONDERFUL PLANS FOR A NEW ONE MAN SHIP AND
THAT'S THEIR DAUGHTER
IDERIA?
THE SKINNY ONE ALWAYS SPATTERED WITH PAINT?
THAT'S HER?
IT'S BEEN MORE THAN A FEW YEARS, ROS
WE'RE DIFFERENT, TOO
JON...

I THINK I REALLY OUGHT TO WELCOME HER HOME TO MERIDIAN PERSONALLY!
IDERIA!
LEAVE YOUR CHALKS AND COME BACK TO THIS WORLD, DAYDREAMER.
-- HERE'S ANOTHER OLD FRIEND TO MEET AGAIN.
HELLO, JON. AND WHO'S WITH YOU?
IDERIA --
-- I DIDN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE YOU!
I SHOULD HAVE -- AND IF I'D LOOKED AT YOUR ART FIRST, I SURELY WOULD HAVE.

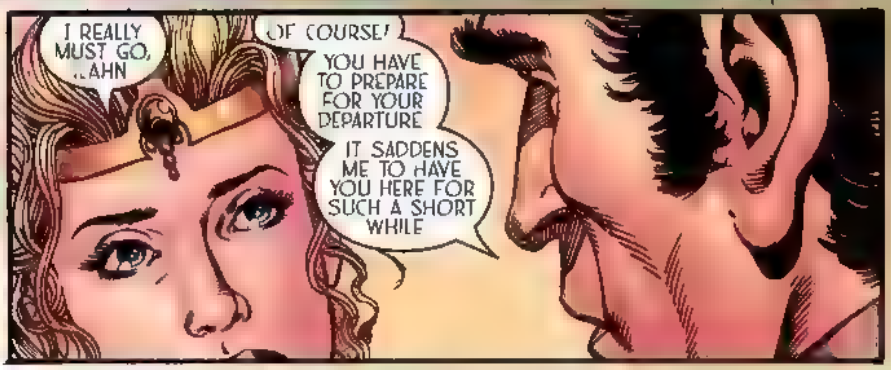
Oh, NO
WHAT IS IT?
TROUBLE, DEAR
TAKE A LOOK
OUR DAUGHTER, THE MINISTER'S SON
--THAT'S A PATH TO CERTAIN DISAPPOINTMENT
IT'S TUROS IDERIA
I HOPE YOU REMEMBER ME AFTER SO LONG
ARE YOU HOME TO STAY I HOPE?
OH, NO
JUST UNTIL THE NEW SHIP'S LAUNCHED
THEN I'M OFF ON MY OWN SOLO JOURNEY TUROS ?
THEY'RE JUST *TALKING*, DEAR
TUROS ?
TUROS!
Oh
YOU'RE THE MINISTER'S SON!
AAA!
EXCUSE ME, PLEASE
I--
I HAVE TO GO
OOOF!
WHY, *IDERIA*
I WAS HOPING I'D RUN INTO YOU, ALTHOUGH NOT QUITE SO LITERALLY
YOU RECOGNIZED ME?
THAT'S BEEN A RARE EVENT TODAY
HOW COULD I NOT?
YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED A BIT--

--YOU'RE STILL AS BEAUTIFUL AS EVER
I HEARD YOU'VE BEEN ADVENTURING, COLLECTING IMAGES FROM ALL OVER DEMETRIA

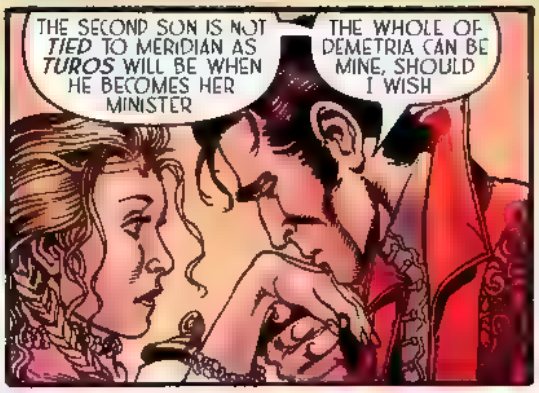

FOR WHICH YOU'LL NEED THIS.
TUROS

Oh, WERE YOU TWO CONVERSING, ILAHN? SORRY TO INTERRUPT!
I'M NOT SORRY YOU
I MEAN I--
THANK YOU, TUROS.
YES
THANK YOU, TUROS.

PERHAPS WE'LL SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN, IDERIA
WHEN YOU'RE NOT IN SUCH A HURRY
PERHAPS WE SHALL, TUROS.
IT'S SUCH A SMALL ISLAND


I REALLY MUST GO, ILAHN
OF COURSE! YOU HAVE TO PREPARE FOR YOUR DEPARTURE
IT SADDENS ME TO HAVE YOU HERE FOR SUCH A SHORT WHILE

I'D LOVE TO JOIN YOU ON A JOURNEY SOMETIME
AFTER ALL, I'M NOT LIKE MY BROTHER


THE SECOND SON IS NOT TIED TO MERIDIAN AS TUROS WILL BE WHEN HE BECOMES HER MINISTER
THE WHOLE OF DEMETRIA CAN BE MINE, SHOULD I WISH

AND YOU DESERVE SOMEONE WHO WOULD GIVE YOU THE WORLD
GOOD DAY, IDERIA

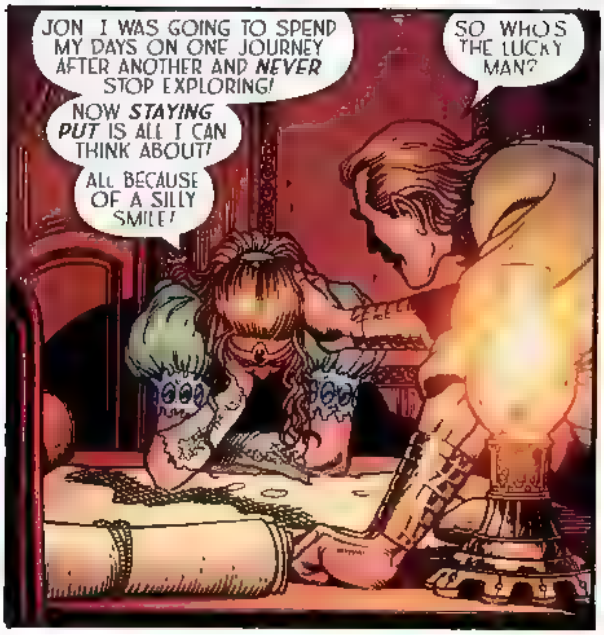
Mother created quite a sensation. She was nearly three decades old and she'd spent more of her life away from Meridian than on it
At an age when most girls were long married and wakening their own children grow, Ileana had no thoughts of settling down
and Papa knew this to be so, even as he spent his days in her pursuit
JON!
ARE YOU READY FOR ME?
HOW COULD I NOT BE READY TO PLOT OUT THE FIRST SOLO TREK OF THE INFAMOUS AND EXOTIC BEAUTY, IDERIA GARSKEN?
OH, JON, PLEASE I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF THAT!
YOU'D THINK I'D BEEN GONE FOR CENTURIES AND TRANSFORMED FROM TROLL TO HUMAN!
THE GULF BETWEEN GIRL AND WOMAN CAN SEEM AS FAR REMOVED TO US MEN
LET'S SEE THOSE MAPS!
DO YOU NEED TO DELIVER THE NEW SHIP TO KENNIT RIGHT AWAY?
WITH MOTHER AND FATHER STAYING TO OVERSEE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW WASP DESIGN, I'M FREE TO TAKE AS LONG AS I LIKE. THERE'S A SMALL ISLAND TO THE SOUTH OF KENNIT I'D LIKE TO SEE
WE'LL TOW THE NEW SHIP WITHOUT CREW, SO IT DOESN'T MUCH MATTER HOW LONG IT FOLLOWS ALONG
IT'S YOUR CALL -- WE CAN TAKE AS MUCH TIME AS YOU WANT. SEE WHATEVER YOU PLEASE

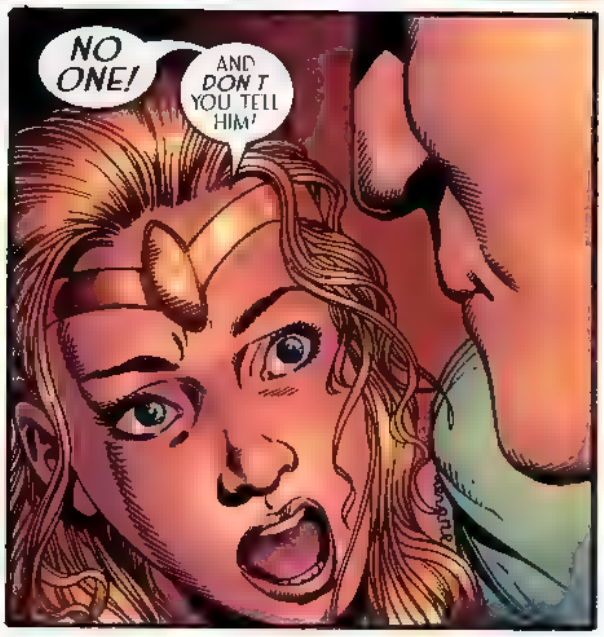
I COPIED THIS MAP FROM THE MASTER OF AN AROUDAN SHIP

ALONG THE EASTERN COAST OF THE LAND BENEATH REENDRAU LIVES AN ANIMAL WITH THE MOST AMAZING PELT
I SAW ONE! THE FUR SHINES LIKE COPPER IN THE SUN!
I'D LIKE TO SEE IT AGAIN, IN LIFE.
DO YOU WANT TO STOP AT THE CAVERNS ON THE WAY?

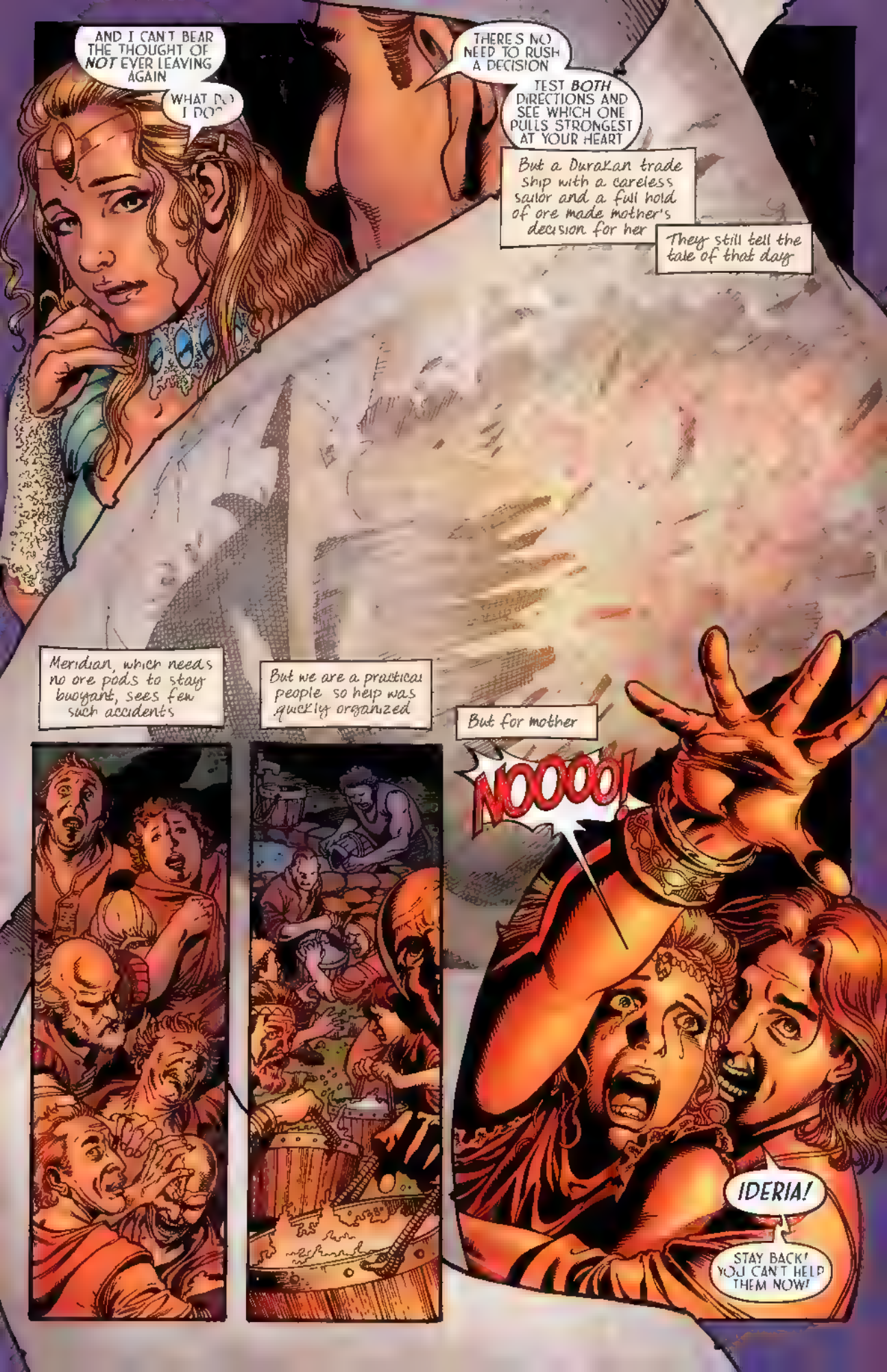
THAT'S AN IDEA -- I'VE NEVER BEEN INSIDE
I'D ALSO LIKE TO SEE
SEE
I'M SORRY JON
I JUST CAN'T SEEM TO CONCENTRATE
HMMM?

I'D BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO DESIGNING MY OWN JOURNEY SINCE
I THOUGHT I'D ENJOY IT MORE, BUT
BUT NOW


JON I WAS GOING TO SPEND MY DAYS ON ONE JOURNEY AFTER ANOTHER AND NEVER STOP EXPLORING!
NOW STAYING PUT IS ALL I CAN THINK ABOUT!
ALL BECAUSE OF A SILLY SMILE!
SO WHO'S THE LUCKY MAN?

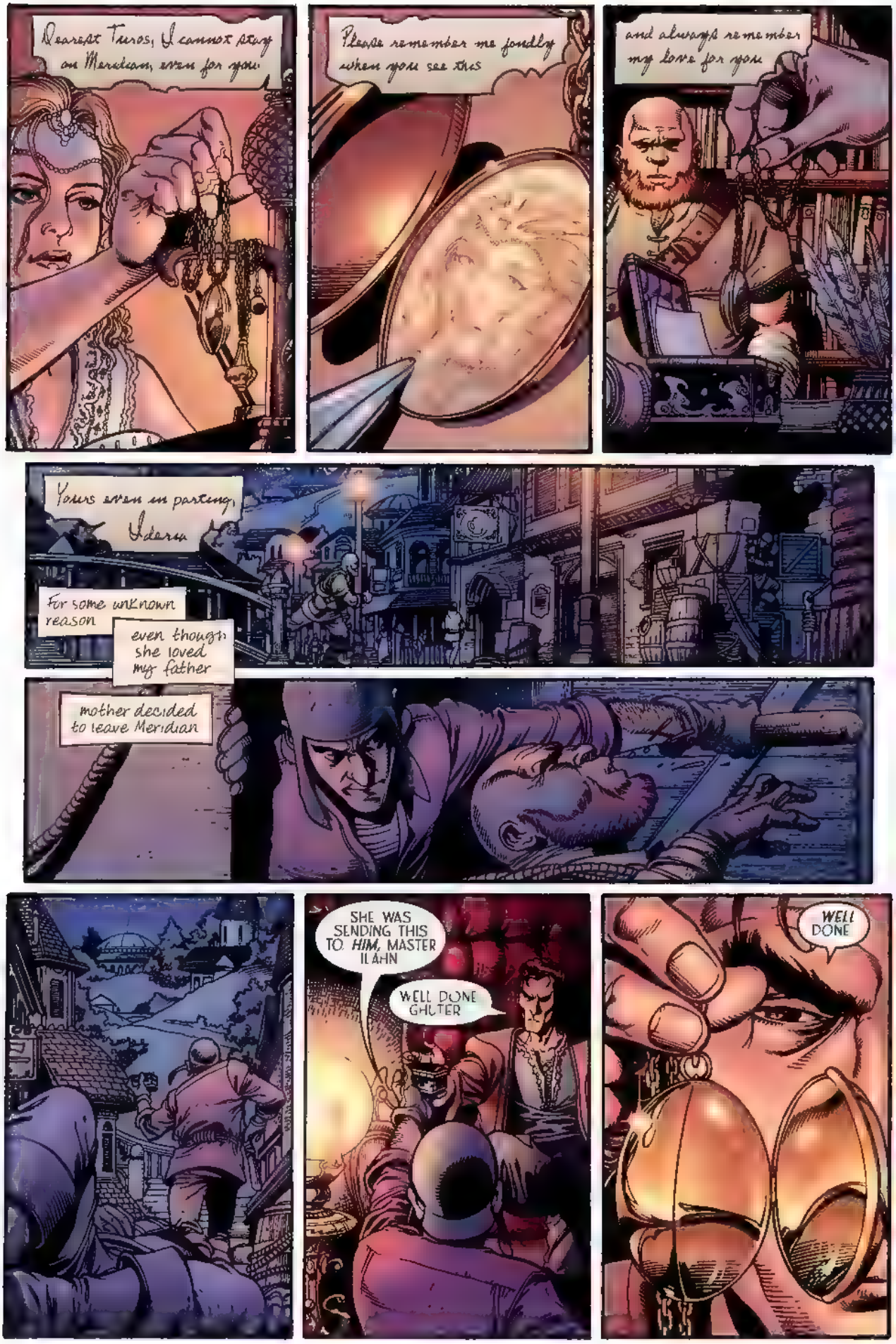

NO ONE!
AND DON'T YOU TELL HIM!

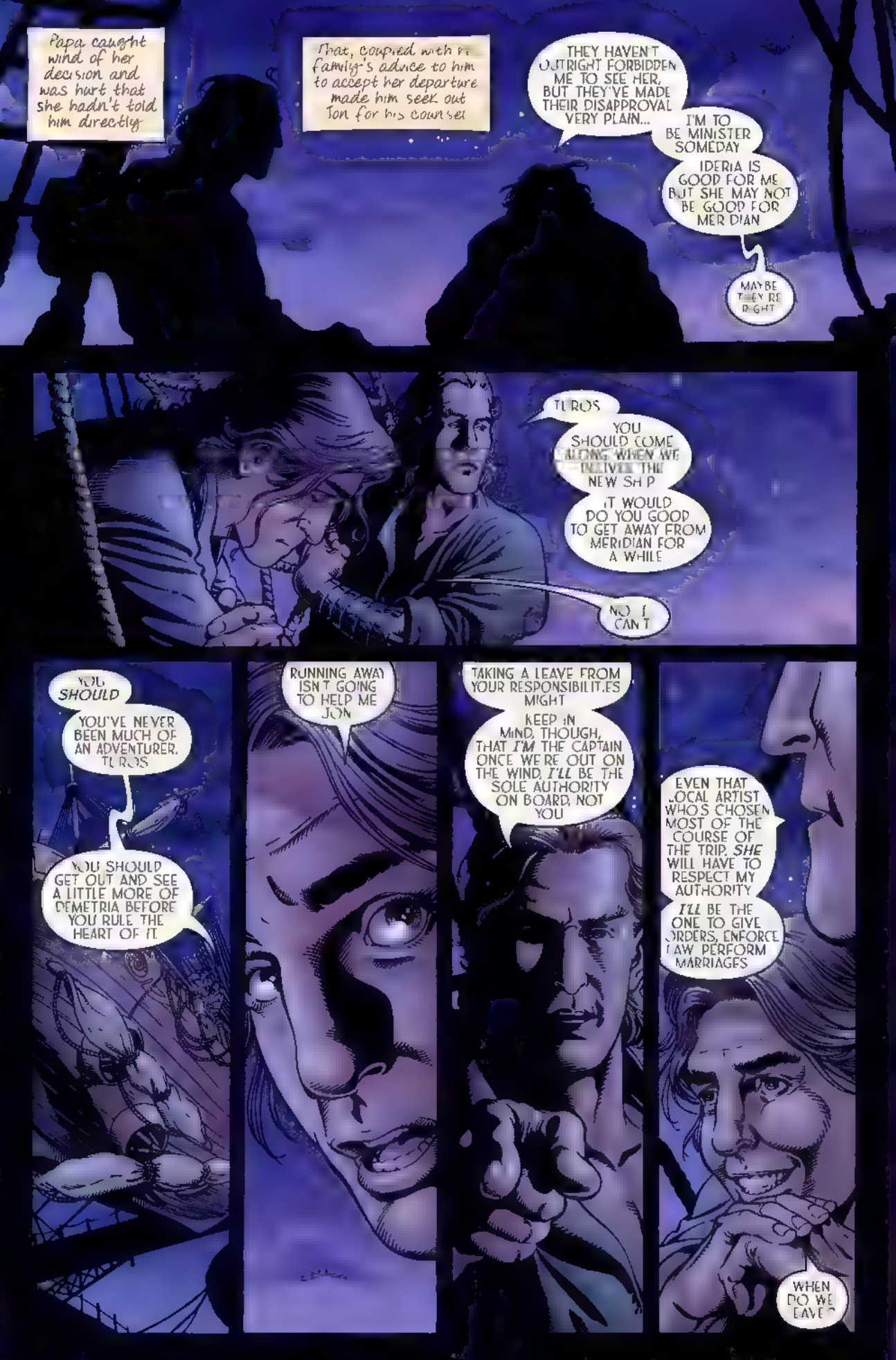
HE'S EVERYWHERE I GO, JON
AT FIRST HE JUST *HAPPENED* TO CROSS MY PATH
BUT I REALIZED I'VE ALWAYS MADE SURE MY LOCATION WAS EASY TO SPOT!
NOW IT'S GOTTEN TO THE POINT WHERE HE'S ALWAYS WITH ME
EVEN WHEN I'M ALL ALONE
I CAN'T LEAVE, JON


AND I CAN'T BEAR THE THOUGHT OF NOT EVER LEAVING AGAIN
WHAT DO I DO?
THERE'S NO NEED TO RUSH A DECISION
TEST BOTH DIRECTIONS AND SEE WHICH ONE PULLS STRONGEST AT YOUR HEART
But a Durakan trade ship with a careless sailor and a full hold of ore made mother's decision for her
They still tell the tale of that day
Meridian, which needs no ore pods to stay buoyant, sees few such accidents
But we are a practical people so help was quickly organized
But for mother
NOOOO!
IDERIA!
STAY BACK! YOU CAN'T HELP THEM NOW!

nothing could save her wound
I know her agony I've carried this same scream inside me since Papa died
They were having a quiet meal in the rim cafe when it happened
Mother would have been with them
He assumed their union was only a matter of course

but mother had different thoughts
Dearest Taurah
I cannot stay on Meridawn even for you. Please remember me gently when you see this and always remember my
SO YOU HAVE TO STAY ON MERIDIAN AND OVERSEE THE NEW SHIP FOR YOUR PARENTS
IS STAYING HERE WITH ME REALLY SO BAD?
THERE ARE OTHERS WHO CAN SEE TO THE SHIP'S SUPERVISION -- LEAVE IT TO THEM
COME AWAY WITH ME LEAVE MERIDIAN AND YOUR PAIN BEHIND
I WILL TREAT YOU LIKE A QUEEN
IN FACT, ANY OTHER WOMAN WILL SUFFER BY COMPARISON
IDERIA, CAN YOUR CONSCIENCE ALLOW THAT?
I'LL NEVER FORGET YOU. I'LL NEVER LET YOU GO.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE INTENSITY OF MY DEVOTION?
I SYMPATHIZE WITH YOUR LOSS BUT I BRING SOME COMFORT
I'VE CALLED IN NESCOAN'S TOP CARRIAGEMAKER TO OVERSEE THE SHIP'S CONSTRUCTION
FREEING YOU TO LEAVE MERIDIAN
WE BOTH KNOW THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY
I KNOW YOU AND MY SON CARE FOR EACH OTHER
BUT HE HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO MERIDIAN
HE MUST MARRY A WOMAN
YOUNG ENOUGH


Dearest Turos, I cannot stay on Meridian, even for you.
Please remember me fondly when you see this
and always remember my love for you
Yours even in parting, Ideria
For some unknown reason
even though she loved my father
mother decided to leave Meridian
SHE WAS SENDING THIS TO HIM, MASTER ILÁHN
WELL DONE GHUTER
WELL DONE

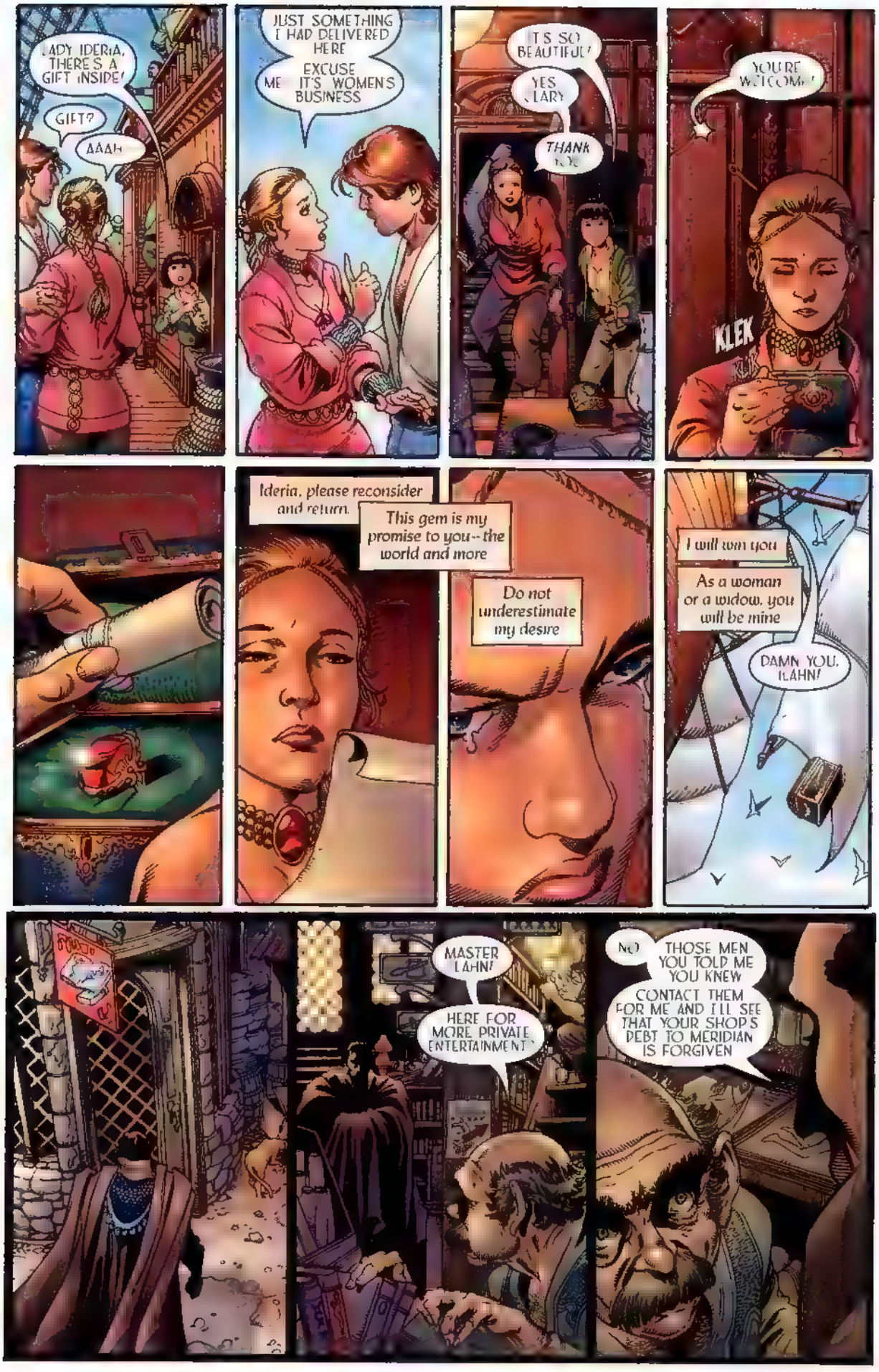

Papa caught wind of her decision and was hurt that she hadn't told him directly
That, coupled with my family's advice to him to accept her departure made him seek out Ion for his counsel
THEY HAVEN'T OUTRIGHT FORBIDDEN ME TO SEE HER, BUT THEY'VE MADE THEIR DISAPPROVAL VERY PLAIN...
I'M TO BE MINISTER SOMEDAY
IDERIA IS GOOD FOR ME BUT SHE MAY NOT BE GOOD FOR MERIDIAN
MAYBE THEY'RE RIGHT
TUROS
YOU SHOULD COME ALONG WHEN WE DELIVER THE NEW SHIP
IT WOULD DO YOU GOOD TO GET AWAY FROM MERIDIAN FOR A WHILE
NO, I CAN'T
YOU SHOULD
YOU'VE NEVER BEEN MUCH OF AN ADVENTURER, TUROS
YOU SHOULD GET OUT AND SEE A LITTLE MORE OF DEMETRIA BEFORE YOU RULE THE HEART OF IT
RUNNING AWAY ISN'T GOING TO HELP ME JON
TAKING A LEAVE FROM YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES MIGHT
KEEP IN MIND, THOUGH, THAT I'M THE CAPTAIN ONCE WE'RE OUT ON THE WIND, I'LL BE THE SOLE AUTHORITY ON BOARD, NOT YOU
EVEN THAT LOCAL ARTIST WHO'S CHOSEN MOST OF THE COURSE OF THE TRIP, SHE WILL HAVE TO RESPECT MY AUTHORITY
I'LL BE THE ONE TO GIVE ORDERS, ENFORCE LAW PERFORM MARRIAGES
WHEN DO WE LEAVE?

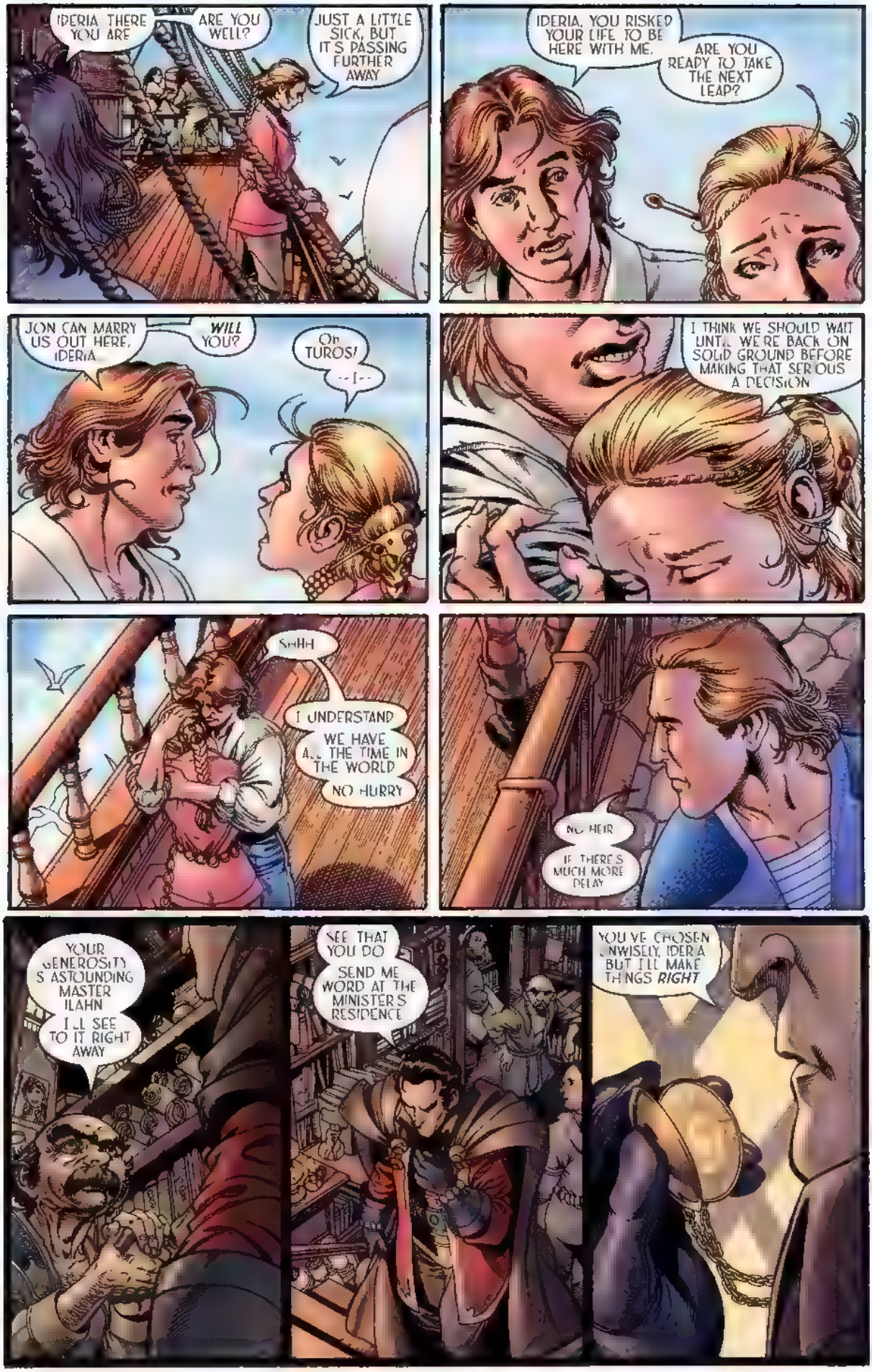
I'LL HAVE THE SHIPS READY TO PUSH OFF IN THE MORNING
WILL YOU STOP FRETTING?
HE'S NOT HERE, JON
I THOUGHT HE'D BE HERE
MINISTER DRACHL PROBABLY ADVISED AGAINST HIS PRESENCE HERE TODAY
HE WAS NO DOUBT CONCERNED THAT TUROS MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO COME ALONG
BUT TUROS WOULD NEVER LEAVE MERIDIAN
NOT EVEN FOR ME
YOU NEVER KNOW
A MAN FINDS HIMSELF DOING MANY SURPRISING THINGS FOR THE RIGHT WOMAN

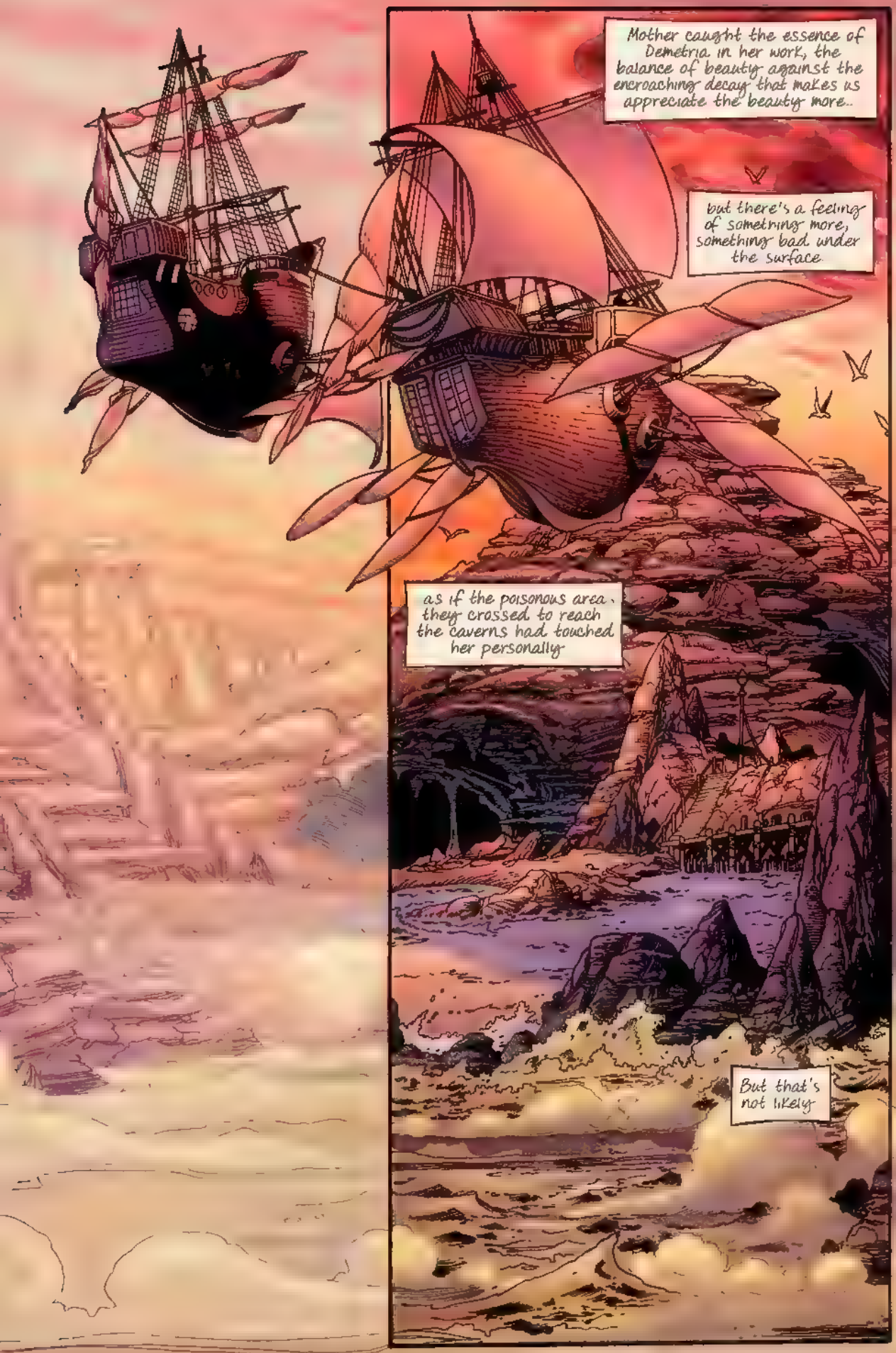
"TRUST IN TUROS, IDERIA
TUROS
JON
I'M SORRY
I JUST CAN'T GO
IDERIA!
WAIT!
BUT--
HE'S
HE'S TOO GOOD TO LOSE!
WHAT DO YOU DO JON?
REVEAL TUROS NOW AND HE'S SHAMED BEFORE THE MINISTER
THEY'RE PARTED
GOING A DISTANCE STRENGTHENS THE HEART RIGHT?
NEVER INTERFERE THAT'S THE LESSON HERE
YOU'LL HAVE TO DELIVER THE SHIP WITHOUT ME!
I CAN'T GO!
LEOH, TAKE US AWAY
SLOWLY.
GIVE THEM A SHOW
YES, JON
I'M SORRY, JON!
GOOD JOURNEY!

KEEP HER TIGHT TO THE ISLAND NOW--
VERY GOOD
IDERIA!
ILAHN
YOU CHOSE TO STAY
I APPLAUD YOUR CHOICE
YOU GOT MY GIFT, I ASSUME?
GIFT?
NO, I--
ILAHN
I CAME BACK FOR HIM, NOT YOU
TUROS.
YOU WOULD STAY FOR TUROS
HOW IRONIC
TUROS IS HIDING ON THAT SHIP FOR YOU
Oh, NO!
IDERA!
NO
NO!

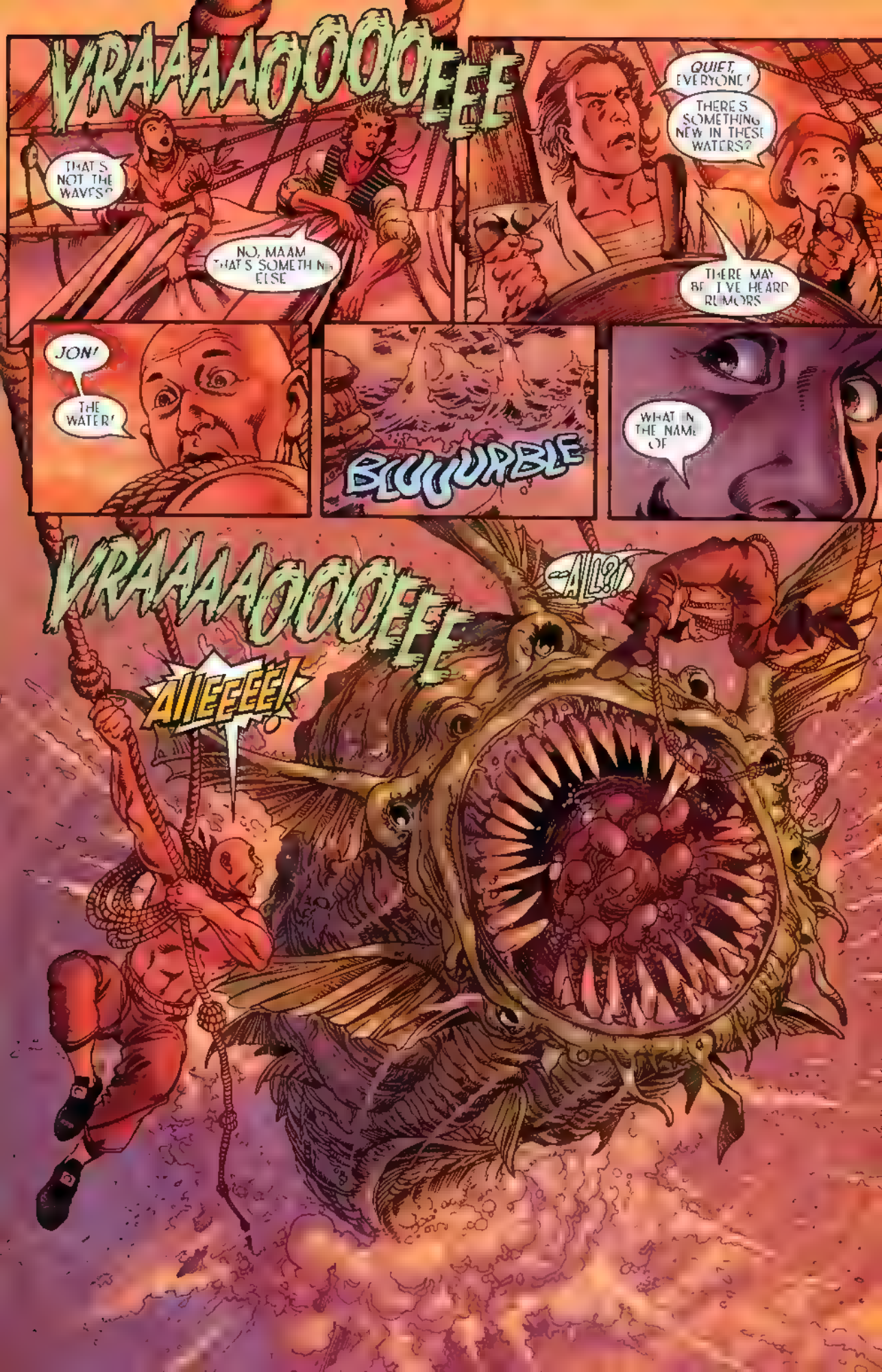
I WAS HOPING YOU'D CHANGE YOUR MIND
I WON'T DO IT AGAIN I PROMISE
JON, WHERE IS HE?
ON THE FAR SIDE OF PANIC BUT RECOVERING QUICKLY
SEE FOR YOURSELF
IDERIA!
Oh TUROS!
IDERIA!
HARD AWAY!
SO
YOU MAY HAVE WON HER TUROS
BUT ONLY FOR NOW


LADY IDERIA, THERE'S A GIFT INSIDE!
GIFT?
AAAH
JUST SOMETHING I HAD DELIVERED HERE
EXCUSE ME IT'S WOMEN'S BUSINESS
IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL!
YES LARY
THANK YOU
YOU'RE WELCOME!
KLEK
Ideria, please reconsider and return.
This gem is my promise to you--the world and more
Do not underestimate my desire
I will win you
As a woman or a widow, you will be mine
DAMN YOU, ILAHN!
MASTER ILAHN!
HERE FOR MORE PRIVATE ENTERTAINMENT
NO
THOSE MEN YOU TOLD ME YOU KNEW
CONTACT THEM FOR ME AND I'LL SEE THAT YOUR SHOP'S DEBT TO MERIDIAN IS FORGIVEN


IDERIA THERE YOU ARE
ARE YOU WELL?
JUST A LITTLE SICK, BUT IT'S PASSING FURTHER AWAY
IDERIA, YOU RISKED YOUR LIFE TO BE HERE WITH ME.
ARE YOU READY TO TAKE THE NEXT LEAP?
JON CAN MARRY US OUT HERE, IDERIA
WILL YOU?
Oh TUROS!
--I--
I THINK WE SHOULD WAIT UNTIL WE'RE BACK ON SOLID GROUND BEFORE MAKING THAT SERIOUS A DECISION
SHHH
I UNDERSTAND
WE HAVE ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD
NO HURRY
NO HEIR
IF THERE'S MUCH MORE DELAY
YOUR GENEROSITY IS ASTOUNDING MASTER ILAHN
I'LL SEE TO IT RIGHT AWAY
SEE THAT YOU DO
SEND ME WORD AT THE MINISTER'S RESIDENCE
YOU'VE CHOSEN UNWISELY, IDERIA BUT I'LL MAKE THINGS *RIGHT*

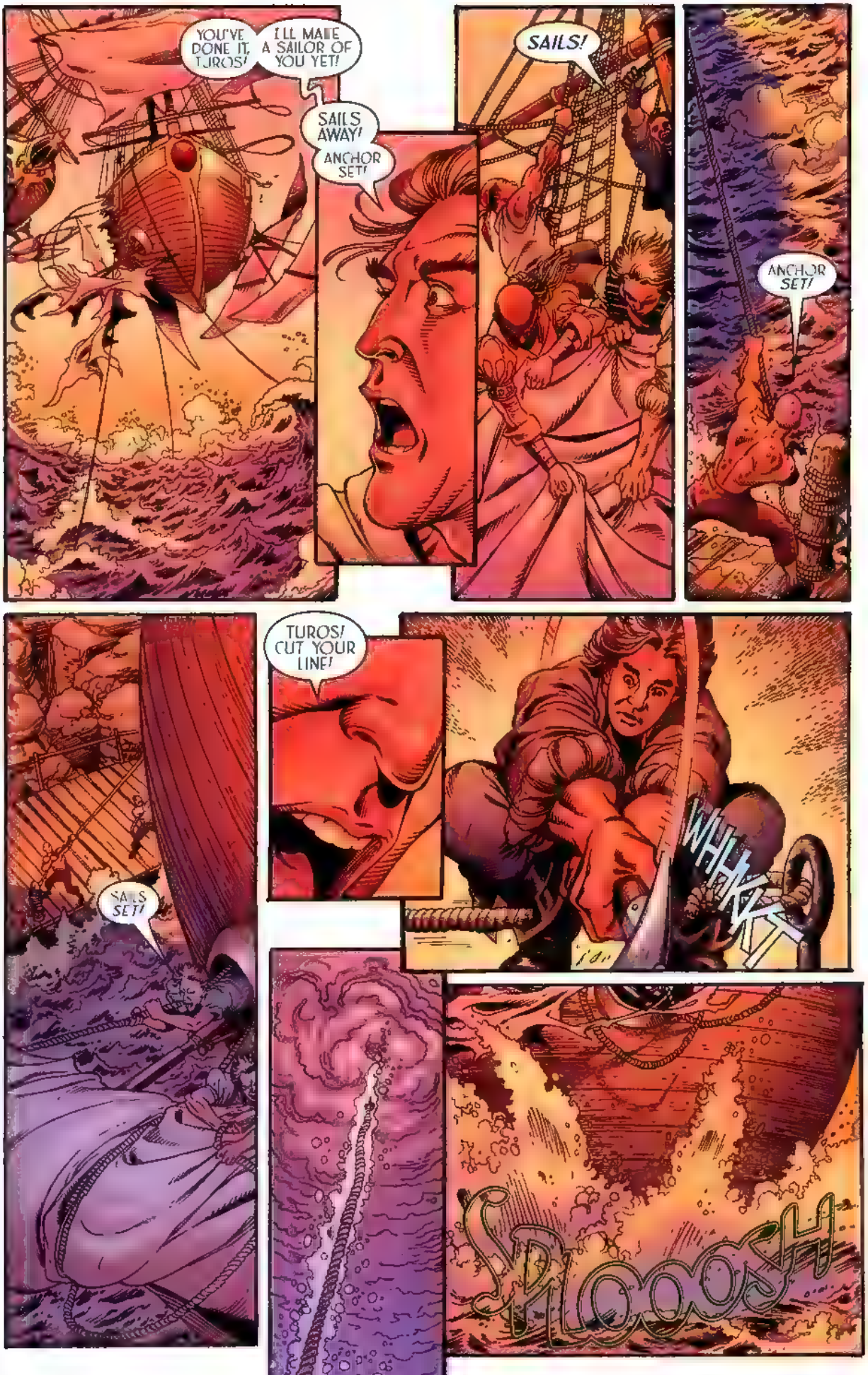

Mother caught the essence of Demetria in her work, the balance of beauty against the encroaching decay that makes us appreciate the beauty more..
but there's a feeling of something more, something bad under the surface
as if the poisonous area they crossed to reach the caverns had touched her personally
But that's not likely

because she and Papa were so happy together
TUROS, IDERIA - READY TO EXPLORE THE CAVERNS?
BALLAST AWAY!
ANCHOR US DOWN!
SAILS FURLED!
AND WATCH THE WAVES -- THE TOXIC LINE'S MOVED INWARD SINCE OUR LAST STOP HERE!
I WANT TO KEEP THIS TRIP UNEVENTFUL!
BLOOP
KRASPLOOSH
VRAAAAOOOOEEE
WHAT'S THAT?
I'VE NEVER HEARD THAT BEFORE

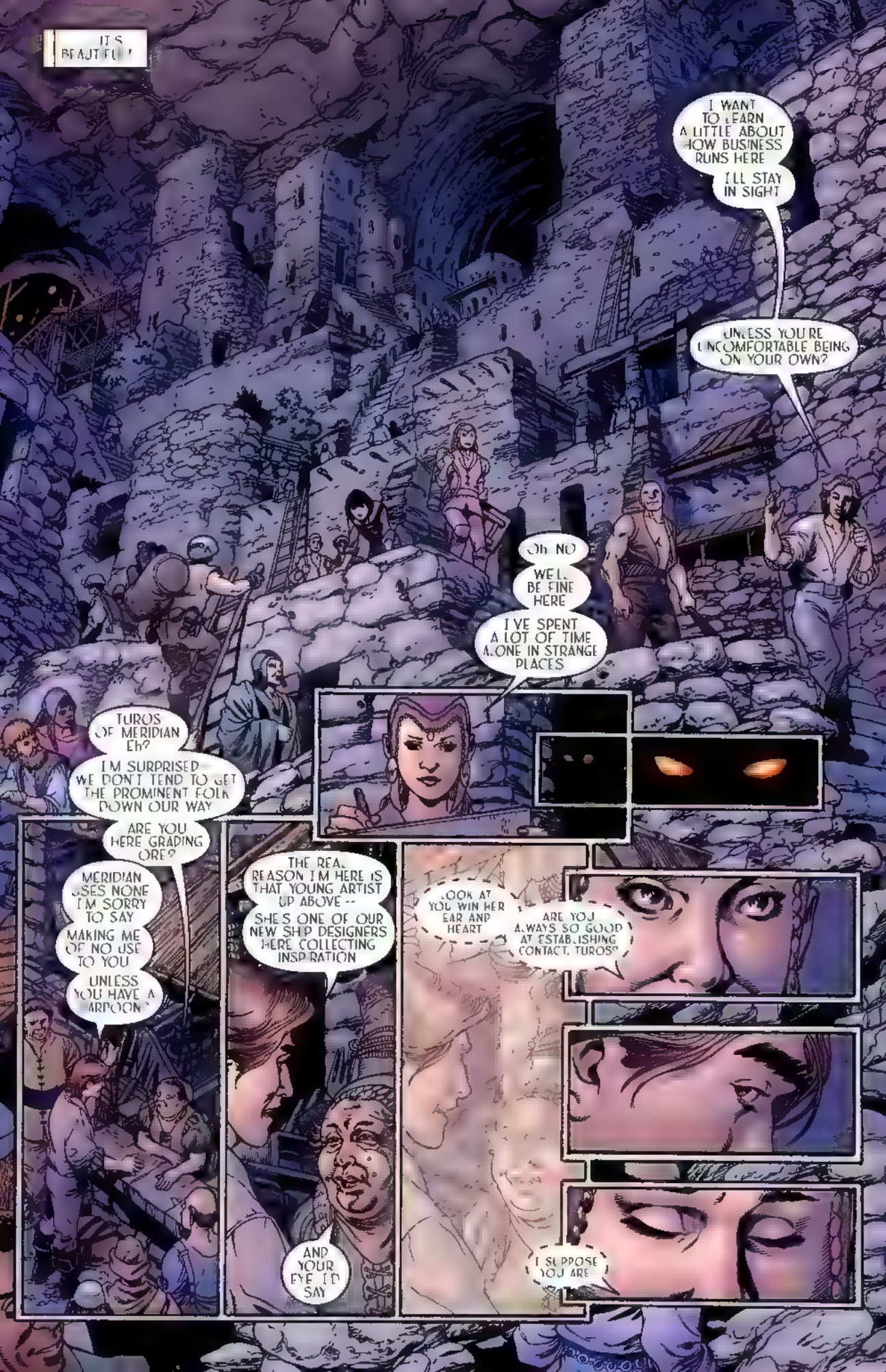

VRAAAAOOOOEEE
THAT'S NOT THE WAVES?
NO, MAAM THAT'S SOMETHING ELSE
QUIET, EVERYONE!
THERE'S SOMETHING NEW IN THESE WATERS?
THERE MAY BE, I'VE HEARD RUMORS
JON!
THE WATER!
BLUUURBLE
WHAT IN THE NAME OF
VRAAAAOOOOEEE
ALL?!
ALLEEEE!

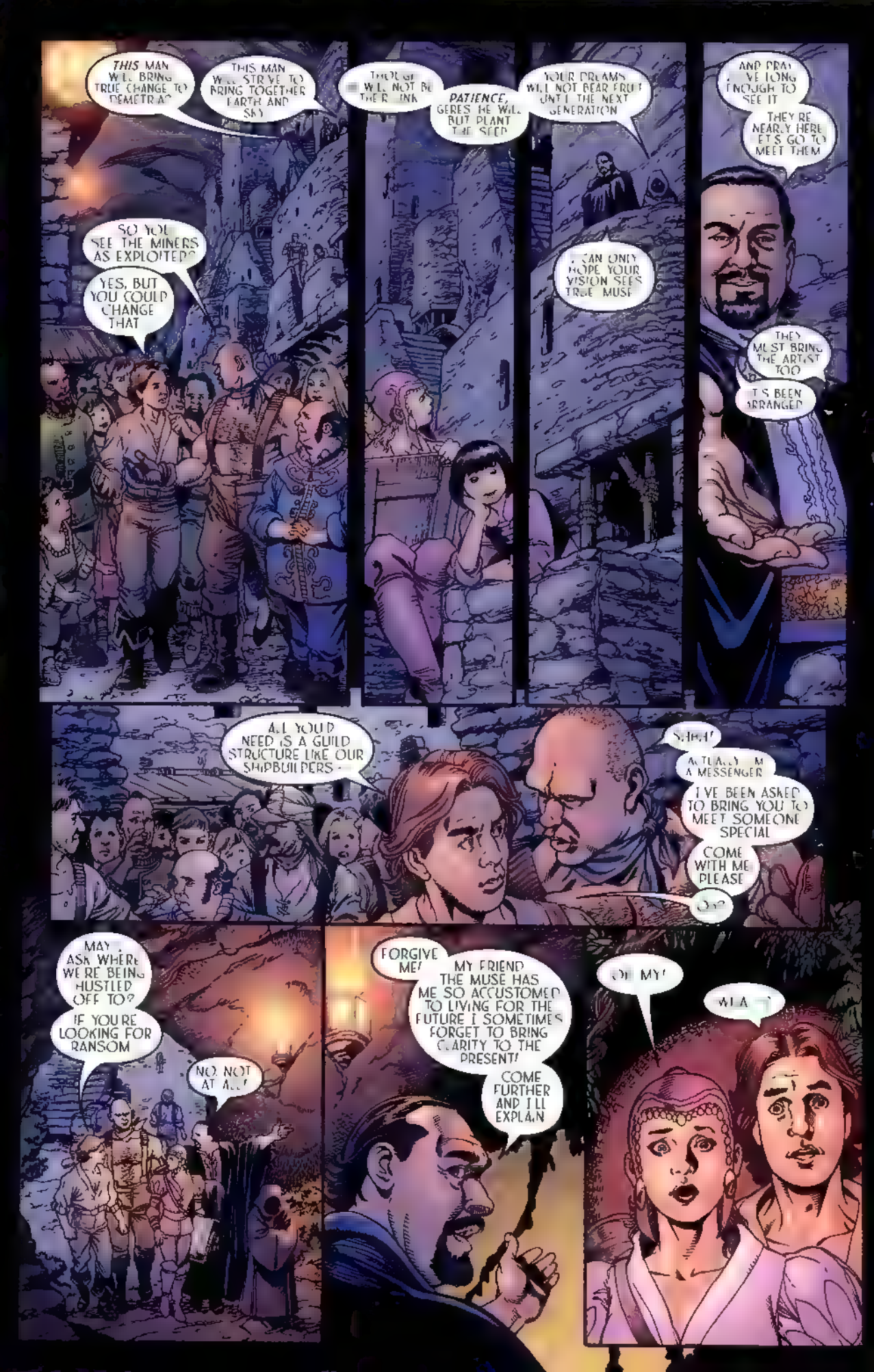
VRAAAGOOEE
KRAAAK SKRUNNNCH
UNFURL THE SAILS!
KRNNNKH
HANG ON, LADY IDERA!
YAAAH!
KRNNNCHOOOOM
THE SAILS!
WE'VE GOT TO CATCH THE WIND TO RISE!

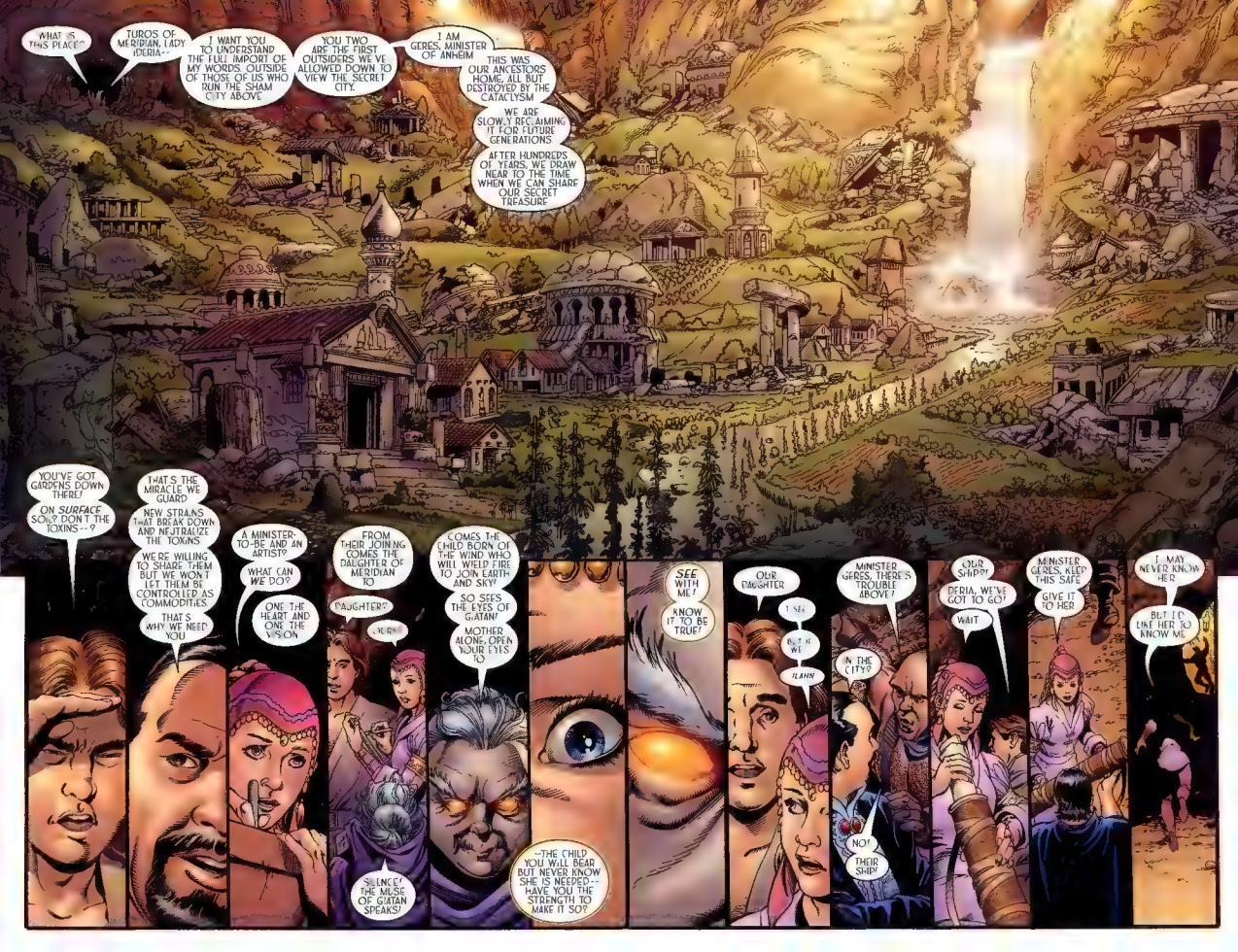
WE'RE *LOST*, JON! THE CREATURE S DONE US IN!
THE SAILS GONE! WITHOUT IT, WE'LL BE SHOT TO AIRLESS HEIGHTS!
NO! THIS SHIP'S NOT LOST!
VRAAAAOOOEEE
WE JUST NEED AN *ANCHOR* TO DRAG US TO RIGHTS!
SPLUTCH


YOU'VE DONE IT, TUROS!
I'LL MAKE A SAILOR OF YOU YET!
SAILS AWAY!
ANCHOR SET!
SAILS!
ANCHOR SET!
SAILS SET!
TUROS! CUT YOUR LINE!
WHIKK!
SPLOOSH

And Papa said their journey was nothing to boast about!
REPAIRS SHOULD DELAY US ONLY A WEEK OR TWO.
TAKE YOUR TIME IN THE CITY THERE'S NOT MUCH BEYOND THE MAIN STRIP, SO YOU'LL GET TO KNOW IT WELL.
I'LL STAY WITH THE SHIP.
OH, AND TUROS?
I'M DOWN A HARPOON, O HUNTER OF BEASTS. SO YOU MIGHT WANT TO SEE IF ONE'S AVAILABLE FOR SALE.
NOW IF I COULD TRY BUY YOU A NEW SHIP.
BUT THAT WOULDN'T GIVE YOU THE SAME SATISFACTION AS COMPLAINING OVER REPAIRS.
LADY IDORIA, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
MINING, LARY.
THIS IS WHERE THEY DIG OUT THE ORE THAT MAKES THE ISLANDS FLOAT.
THESE MEN ARE WORKING THEMSELVES TO DEATH. IT'S INHUMANE.
THEY'RE WORKING TO EARN THEIR SPOT IN THE SKY, TUROS.
AGAIN


IT'S BEAUTIFUL!
I WANT TO LEARN A LITTLE ABOUT HOW BUSINESS RUNS HERE
I'LL STAY IN SIGHT
UNLESS YOU'RE UNCOMFORTABLE BEING ON YOUR OWN?
OH NO
WE'LL BE FINE HERE
I'VE SPENT A LOT OF TIME ALONE IN STRANGE PLACES
TUROS OF MERIDIAN Eh?
I'M SURPRISED WE DON'T TEND TO GET THE PROMINENT FOLK DOWN OUR WAY
ARE YOU HERE GRADING ORE?
MERIDIAN USES NONE I'M SORRY TO SAY
MAKING ME OF NO USE TO YOU
UNLESS YOU HAVE A HARPOON?
THE REAL REASON I'M HERE IS THAT YOUNG ARTIST UP ABOVE --
SHE'S ONE OF OUR NEW SHIP DESIGNERS HERE COLLECTING INSPIRATION
AND YOUR EYE I'D SAY
LOOK AT YOU WIN HER EAR AND HEART
ARE YOU ALWAYS SO GOOD AT ESTABLISHING CONTACT, TUROS?
I SUPPOSE YOU ARE


THIS MAN WILL BRING TRUE CHANGE TO DEMETRIA
THIS MAN WILL STRIVE TO BRING TOGETHER EARTH AND SKY
THOUGH WE WILL NOT BE THERE TO DRINK
PATIENCE, GERES HE WILL BUT PLANT THE SEED
YOUR DREAMS WILL NOT BEAR FRUIT UNTIL THE NEXT GENERATION
I CAN ONLY HOPE YOUR VISION SEES TRUE MUSE
AND PRAY I'VE LONG ENOUGH TO SEE IT
THEY'RE NEARLY HERE LET'S GO TO MEET THEM
SO YOU SEE THE MINERS AS EXPLOITED?
YES, BUT YOU COULD CHANGE THAT
THEY MUST BRING THE ARTIST TOO
IT'S BEEN ARRANGED
ALL YOUR NEED IS A GUILD STRUCTURE LIKE OUR SHIPBUILDERS
SHIRA!
ACTUALLY I'M A MESSENGER
I'VE BEEN ASKED TO BRING YOU TO MEET SOMEONE SPECIAL
COME WITH ME PLEASE
MAY I ASK WHERE WE'RE BEING HUSTLED OFF TO?
IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR RANSOM
NO, NOT AT ALL!
FORGIVE ME!
MY FRIEND THE MUSE HAS ME SO ACCUSTOMED TO LIVING FOR THE FUTURE I SOMETIMES FORGET TO BRING CLARITY TO THE PRESENT!
COME FURTHER AND I'LL EXPLAIN
OH MY!
WHA-

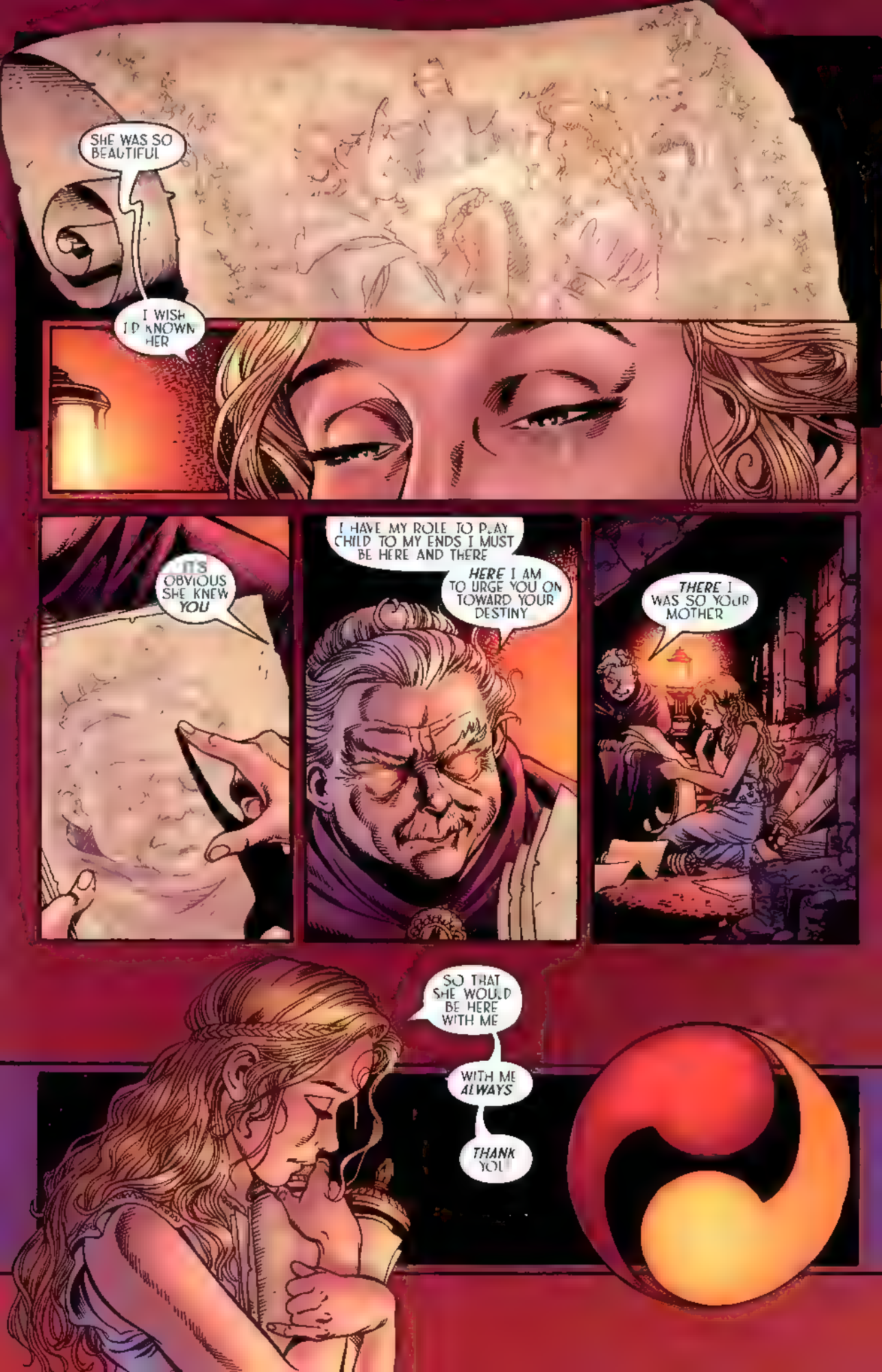

WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
TUROS OF MERIDIAN, LADY IDERIA--
I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND THE FULL IMPORT OF MY WORDS OUTSIDE OF THOSE OF US WHO RUN THE SHAM CITY ABOVE
YOU TWO ARE THE FIRST OUTSIDERS WE'VE ALLOWED DOWN TO VIEW THE SECRET CITY.
I AM GERES, MINISTER OF ANHEIM
THIS WAS OUR ANCESTORS HOME ALL BUT DESTROYED BY THE CATACLYSM
WE ARE SLOWLY RECLAIMING IT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.
AFTER HUNDREDS OF YEARS, WE DRAW NEAR TO THE TIME WHEN WE CAN SHARE OUR SECRET TREASURE
YOU'VE GOT GARDENS DOWN THERE?
ON SURFACE SOIL? DON'T THE TOXINS--?
THAT'S THE MIRACLE WE GUARD
NEW STRAINS THAT BREAK DOWN AND NEUTRALIZE THE TOXINS
WE'RE WILLING TO SHARE THEM BUT WE WON'T LET THEM BE CONTROLLED AS COMMODITIES
THAT'S WHY WE NEED YOU
A MINISTER-TO-BE AND AN ARTIST?
WHAT CAN WE DO?
ONE THE HEART AND ONE THE VISION
FROM THEIR JOINING COMES THE DAUGHTER OF MERIDIAN TO
DAUGHTER?
NURSE
SILENCE! THE MUSE OF GIATAN SPEAKS!
COMES THE CHILD BORN OF THE WIND WHO WILL WIELD FIRE TO JOIN EARTH AND SKY
SO SEES THE EYES OF GIATAN!
MOTHER ALONE, OPEN YOUR EYES TO
--THE CHILD YOU WILL BEAR BUT NEVER KNOW SHE IS NEEDED-- HAVE YOU THE STRENGTH TO MAKE IT SO?
SEE WITH ME?
KNOW IT TO BE TRUE?
OUR DAUGHTER
I SEE
BUT IS SHE
ILAHN
MINISTER GERES, THERE'S TROUBLE ABOVE?
IN THE CITY?
NO! THEIR SHIP!
OUR SHIP?
DERIA, WE'VE GOT TO GO!
WAIT
MINISTER GERES, KEEP THIS SAFE
GIVE IT TO HER
I MAY NEVER KNOW HER
BUT I'D LIKE HER TO KNOW ME.

FIRE AWAY, MEN! THEY WON'T TAKE OUR SHIP!
WATCH YOUR AIM -- WE DON'T WANT TO RISK THE NEW ONE IF WE CAN AVOID IT!
NO SHIP'S WORTH THE PRICE OF OUR LIVES, JON!
MERCENARIES?
BUT - WHY WOULD THEY WASTE TIME ON ONE OF *OUR* SHIPS?
WE CARRY NO WEALTH BUT THE VESSELS THEMSELVES!
MAYBE *SHIPS* ARE WHAT THEY WANT!
AUNCH ME!
BUT MASTER TUROS OUR ORDERS! WE CAN'T RISK *YOU!*
YOU WILL TAKE *MY* WORD OVER YOUR ORDERS!
DO IT!
Papa never knew who had sent those men

or why they'd chosen such a meager target
They seemed intent on death not just theft
but they failed to factor in the force of will that fuels the people of Meridian
GET OFF MY SHIP!
YOU WORK FOR HIM, DON'T YOU?
ILAHN SENT YOU!

Papa said that was, in truth, his first day as Minister of Meridian
the first time he acted on his OWN authority
He decided that if they wanted the new ship
that could HAVE it
THERE'S
GET YOUR HANDS OFF HER!
Mother appeared to be very impressed by his newfound authority

When she saw what he'd sacrificed for their safety
THEY DIDN'T WANT THE SHIP
WHAT DID THEY WANT?
She no longer feared their future together
IDERIA PLEASE TELL ME NO ONE CAN KEEP US APART
NO ONE CAN, TUROS
MY ANSWER IS YES
COME WHAT MAY
Meanwhile, Ilahn had left Meridian for Cadador
where his own new bride awaited him
MASTER ILAHN, IT IS MY JOY TO PRESENT MY DAUGHTER
CLAIRESSA
CLAIRESSA?
AREN'T YOU PLEASED TO MEET MASTER ILAHN?
Oh
YES.
PLEASED.
LIKEWISE


SHE WAS SO BEAUTIFUL
I WISH I'D KNOWN HER
OBVIOUS SHE KNEW YOU
I HAVE MY ROLE TO PLAY CHILD TO MY ENDS I MUST BE HERE AND THERE
HERE I AM TO URGE YOU ON TOWARD YOUR DESTINY
THERE I WAS SO YOUR MOTHER
SO THAT SHE WOULD BE HERE WITH ME
WITH ME ALWAYS
THANK YOU

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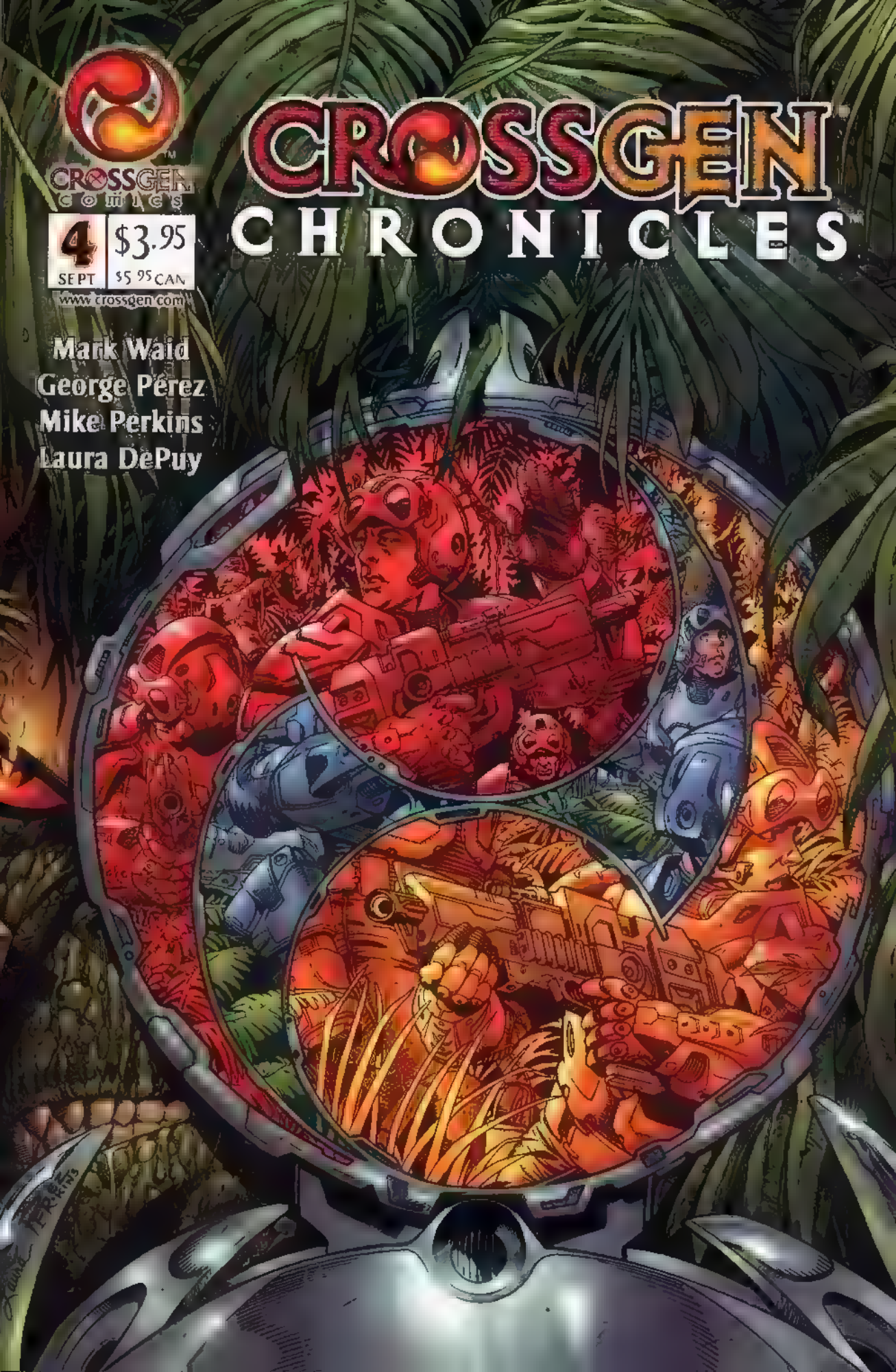
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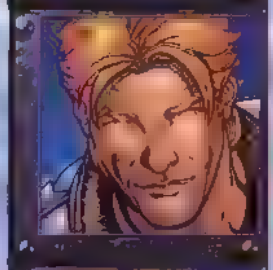
The CrossGen Universe exploded when the Sigil-Bearers were graced with their marks of power – but the worlds of CrossGen existed long before. Chronicles tells tales of pasts both distant and recent, detailing rich histories and hinting at mysterious futures...

SAMANDAHL REY
Former Union soldier. Recently, Sam gained the ability to morph matter and more.

ROIYA SINTOR
Sam's best friend. Slain in battle, her life-essence has been uploaded into the computers of Sam's ship.

ZANNIATI ORIBATTA
A political operative guarded by Sam and Roiya.

JEMERIK MEER
A mysterious stranger with even more mysterious powers.



TCHLUSARUD
Sam's sworn enemy.

FOR CENTURIES,

the five human worlds of the Planetary Union have been at war with the lizardlike Saurians of Tcharun. In recent weeks, ex-soldier SAMANDAHL REY – branded with a sigil of vast power – has led a small band of friends and allies against the Saurians.

For Sam, taking part in this interstellar conflict isn't simply a matter of honor. Sam and a Tcharun named TCHLUSARUD have been at one another's throats for years, and there is nothing either would like more on their hands than the other's blood. But what is the origin of this mutual vendetta?

Sam's friend ROIYA SINTOR tells the story....

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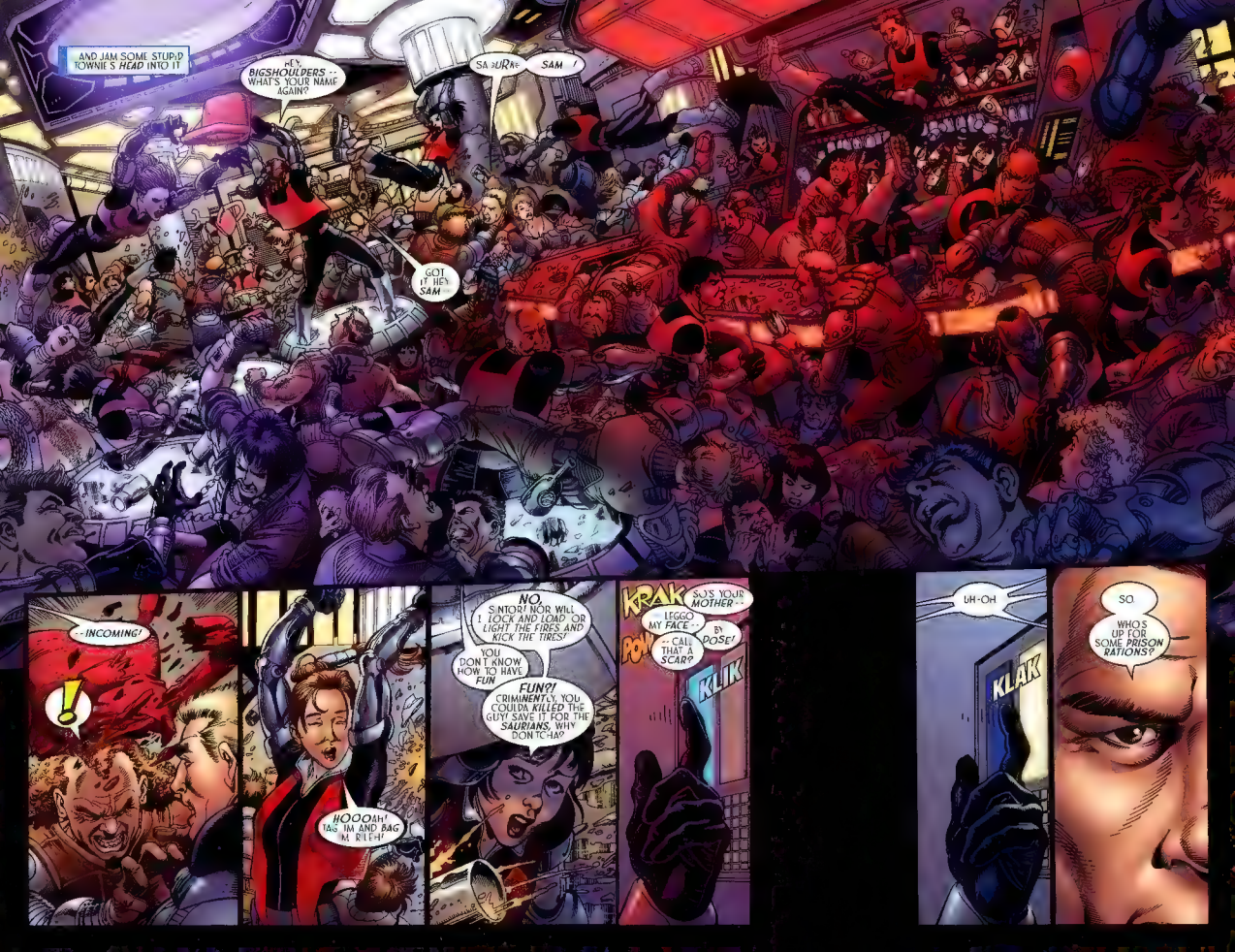
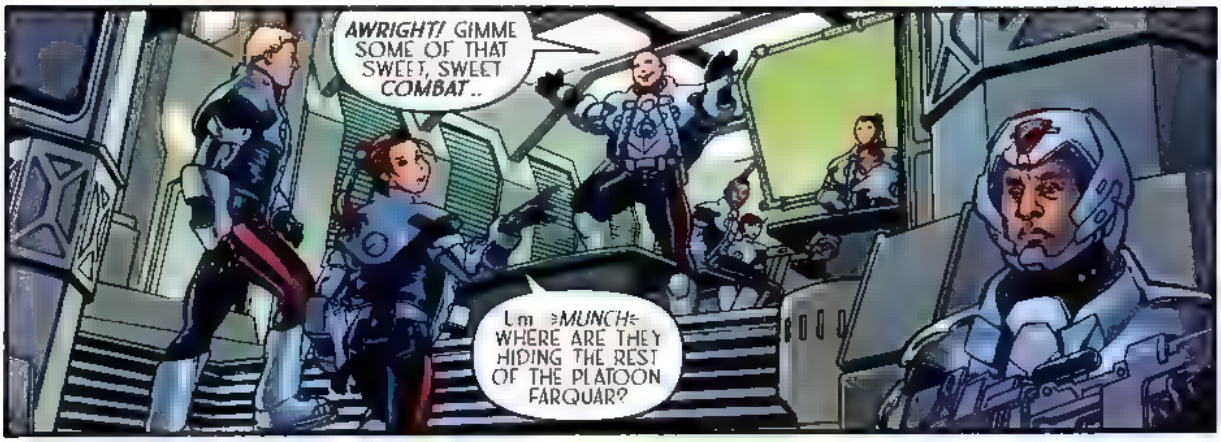
THERE ARE CERTAIN DOWNSIDES TO BEING DEAD
Oh, DON'T GET ME *WRONG* THERE ARE ALSO *PLUSES* TO BEING WHAT, A GHOST IN THE MACHINE ?
I GOT TO TRADE THE EVENTUAL RAVAGES OF *OLD AGE* FOR A PERKY SET OF TACHYON THRUSTERS AND THE PERMANENT CURVES OF A STARSHIP CHASSIS
AND UNLESS SAM DECIDES IT'S FUNNY TO PROGRAM GRAY HAIR INTO MY HOLOMATRIX, NO ONE WILL EVER CALL ME *GRANNY*
BUT I'D BE LYING IF I SAID I DIDN'T MISS THE WORLD OF THE TACTILE OF THE LITTLE FLESH AND-BLOOD PLEASURES THAT MEANT THE WORLD TO ME FRESH OUT OF BOOT CAMP
LIKE THE TASTE OF A CRUNCHPUFF BAR
OR THE RECOIL OF MY FIRST CRACKRIFLE
OR HOW IT FELT TO GRAB A PITCHER OF SUDS AT THE BLASTER BAR


AND JAM SOME STUPID TOWNIE'S HEAD INTO IT
HEY, BIGSHOULDERS -- WHAT'S YOUR NAME AGAIN?
SAURIAN
SAM !
GOT IT HEY SAM
--INCOMING!
!
HOOOAH! TAG 'IM AND BAG 'IM RITE?!
NO, SIMTOR! NOR WILL I. LOCK AND LOAD OR LIGHT THE FIRES AND KICK THE TIRES!
YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO HAVE FUN
FUN?! CRIMINENTLY, YOU COULDA KILLED THE GUY! SAVE IT FOR THE SAURIANS, WHY DON'TCHA?
KRAK
SO'S YOUR MOTHER--
LEGGO MY FACE
BY DOSE!
-- CALL THAT A SCAR?
POW
KLIK
UH-OH
KLAK
SO.
WHO'S UP FOR SOME PRISON RATIONS?

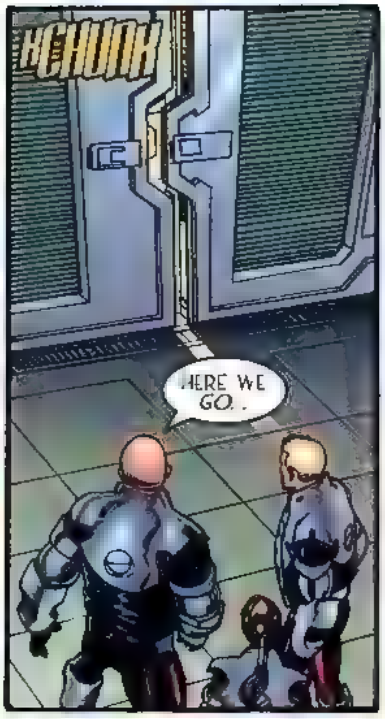
I ASK THIS BECAUSE THE LOCAL COPS AND THE MPS ARE FALLIN ALL OVER THEMSELVES T GET HERE
AND I VE GOT HALF A MIND TO LET EM TAKE THE WHOLE DAMN PLATOON! NOW WHO STARTED THIS?
S SERGEANT WHILTS, SIR! I...I DIDN T MEAN TO. HOW WAS I TO
I MEAN COME ON! WHOSE MOTHER REALLY IS IN THE CIRCUS?
Ah FOOT IN MOUTH DISEASE I SEE
FULL MOON, EMPTY GLASSES YOU SNEEZE FUNNY IN A POWDERKEG LIKE THIS, RIIEH
YOU GET A BRAWL YOU EXPECTED DIFFERENT?
THAT S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU FIGHT GRAVITY!
WHEN YOU FIGHT GRAVITY!
GO HAUL ASS WHILE I HOLD OFF THE COPS
AND IF THIS EVER HAPPENS AGAIN
I MEAN EVER
SAVE A PLACE FOR ME
ALL RIGHT! WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
THAT S WHAT I WANT TO KNOW! WHAT IS T WITH THE SERVICE IN THIS JOINT ?
THAT WAS SERGEANT WHILTS FOR YOU NOT A ONE OF US WOULDN T HAVE MARCHED ACROSS A STAR FOR THAT MAN

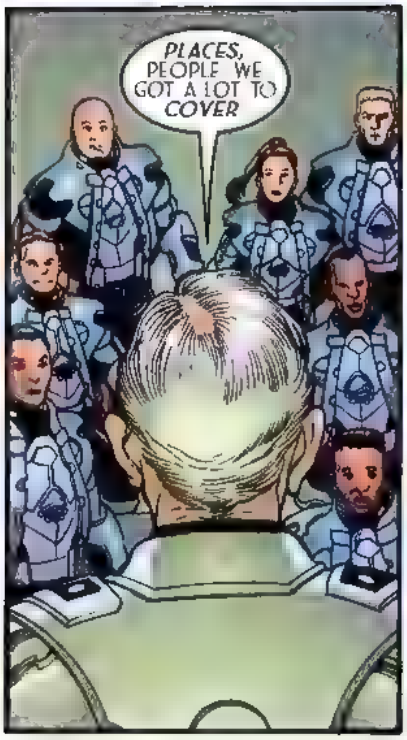
SO, OUT OF RESPECT, THAT WAS IT FOR THE BRAWLS WHICH WAS A REAL SHAME
BECAUSE THAT WAS THE MOST ACTION ANY OF US HAD SEEN SINCE ENLISTING
THREE MONTHS LATER, JUST AS I WAS CONSIDERING TAKING UP NEEDLEPOINT FOR THE THRILL OF IT...
..WE FINALLY GOT A MISSION
SAM?
C'MON, SAM! WE'RE LATE FOR THE BRIEFING!
YOUR CHRON'S FAST WE'VE GOT FIVE MINUTES. BE RIGHT THERE
BACK THEN, NONE OF US WERE SURE WHAT TO MAKE OF SAM. HE WASN'T SHY, HE WASN'T A JERK -- HE WAS JUST DISTANT KEPT TO HIMSELF.
WHICH, OF COURSE, EVERYONE TOOK TO MEAN THAT HE WAS A JERK, BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY..
BUT I'M GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF
DON'T LET ME HOLD YOU UP
SOKAY
CRUNCH-PUFF?
NO, THANK YOU
RIGHT. WOULDN'T WANT TO GET COURT-MARTIALED FOR FRATERNIZING WOULD YA?
FUNNY
LET'S GO
WHY NOT? NOTHING INTERESTING KEEPING US HERE.
SAM'S QUARTERS WERE AN EXTENSION OF WHAT WE LAUGHINGLY CALLED HIS PERSONALITY NEAT ORDERLY
TIGHT
AND DEADLY DULL

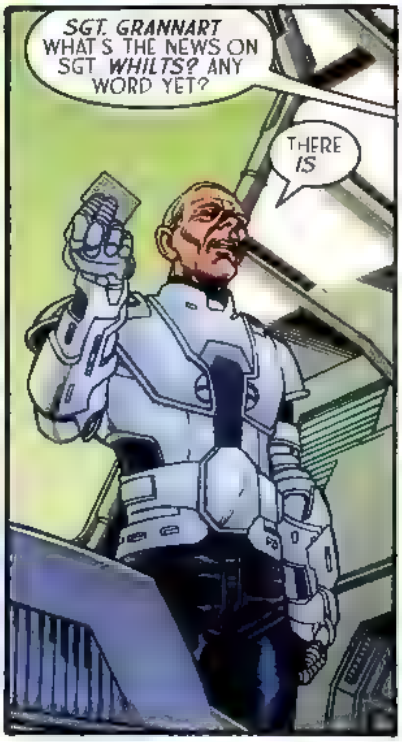

AWRIGHT! GIMME SOME OF THAT SWEET, SWEET COMBAT..
Um =MUNCH= WHERE ARE THEY HIDING THE REST OF THE PLATOON FARQUAR?

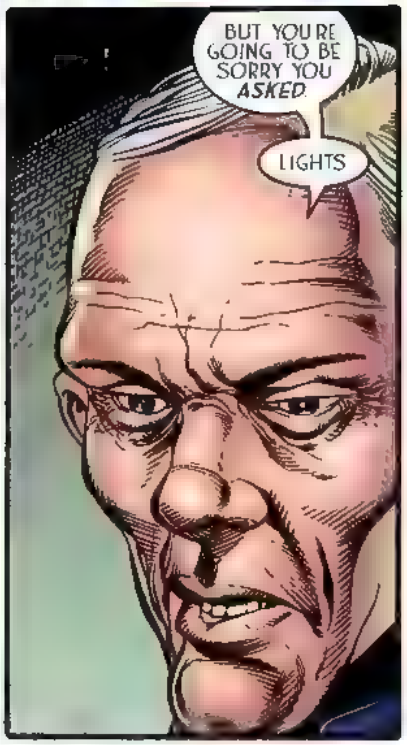
DUNNO WHATEVER THIS IS, THEY'RE KEEPIN IT SMALL JUST A FEW MISSION SPECIALISTS LIKE YOU AND ME AND REY, THERE

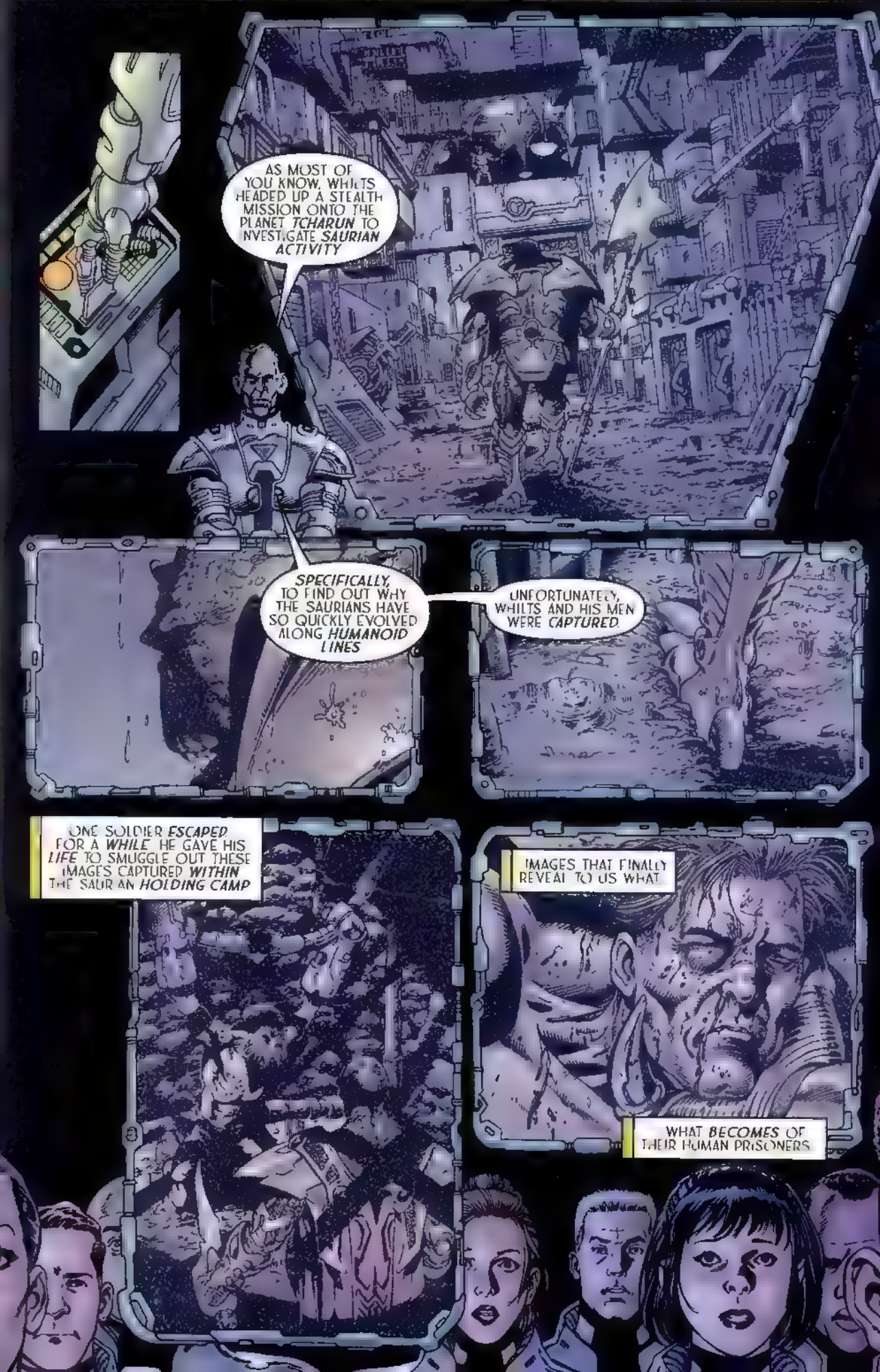
RASPLEY, TOWMAZEE, RILEH AND HASTON
SLP
HEY, I THINK I HEAR SOMEBODY COMING

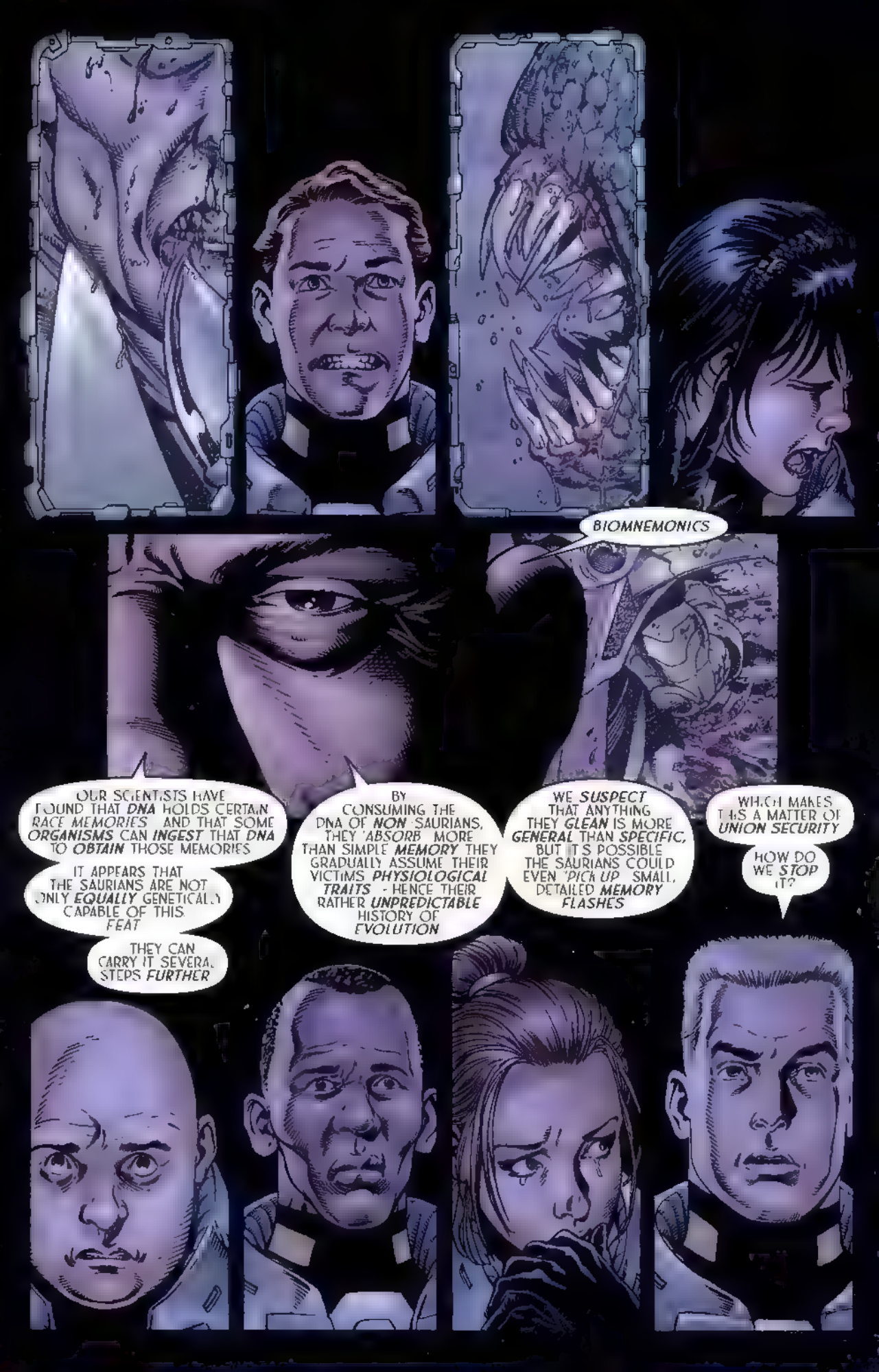

KCHUNK
HERE WE GO..


PLACES, PEOPLE WE GOT A LOT TO COVER


SGT. GRANNART WHAT'S THE NEWS ON SGT WHILTS? ANY WORD YET?
THERE IS


BUT YOU'RE GOING TO BE SORRY YOU ASKED.
LIGHTS


AS MOST OF YOU KNOW, WHILTS HEADED UP A STEALTH MISSION ONTO THE PLANET TCHARUN TO INVESTIGATE SAURIAN ACTIVITY
SPECIFICALLY, TO FIND OUT WHY THE SAURIANS HAVE SO QUICKLY EVOLVED ALONG HUMANOID LINES
UNFORTUNATELY, WHILTS AND HIS MEN WERE CAPTURED.
ONE SOLDIER ESCAPED FOR A WHILE. HE GAVE HIS LIFE TO SMUGGLE OUT THESE IMAGES CAPTURED WITHIN THE SAURIAN HOLDING CAMP
IMAGES THAT FINALLY REVEAL TO US WHAT
WHAT BECOMES OF THEIR HUMAN PRISONERS


BIOMNEMONICS
OUR SCIENTISTS HAVE FOUND THAT DNA HOLDS CERTAIN RACE MEMORIES AND THAT SOME ORGANISMS CAN INGEST THAT DNA TO OBTAIN THOSE MEMORIES
IT APPEARS THAT THE SAURIANS ARE NOT ONLY EQUALLY GENETICALLY CAPABLE OF THIS FEAT
THEY CAN CARRY IT SEVERAL STEPS FURTHER
BY CONSUMING THE DNA OF NON SAURIANS, THEY 'ABSORB' MORE THAN SIMPLE MEMORY THEY GRADUALLY ASSUME THEIR VICTIMS PHYSIOLOGICAL TRAITS - HENCE THEIR RATHER UNPREDICTABLE HISTORY OF EVOLUTION
WE SUSPECT THAT ANYTHING THEY GLEAN IS MORE GENERAL THAN SPECIFIC, BUT IT'S POSSIBLE THE SAURIANS COULD EVEN 'PICK UP' SMALL, DETAILED MEMORY FLASHES
WHICH MAKES THIS A MATTER OF UNION SECURITY
HOW DO WE STOP IT?

SO FAR, HUMAN FLESH IS A RELATIVE RARITY TO THOSE REPTAURS. REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE ROYAL FAMILY CONSUMES THE BULK OF IT. CAN YOU LIVE WITH THAT?
HELL, NO!
THEN GO MAKE AN EXAMPLE OUT OF THEM! THIS INFORMATION IS STRICTLY NEED-TO-KNOW-- SO IT'S UP TO YOU TO GET TO THE SAURIAN HOMEWORLD, FIND THE ROYALS
--AND PAINT A "HANDS OFF HUMANS" SIGN WITH THEIR BLOOD!
SAMANDAHL REY WILL ACT AS YOUR FIELD COMMANDER
THANK YOU, SGT GRANNART
YOU'RE ON A STEALTHCRAFT IN TEN TICKS HUSTLE!
I REMEMBER SAM SITTING STILL AND SILENT AS THE GRAVE FOR THE ENTIRE TRIP.
ALONE, AS USUAL
YOU HEARD ME! WHEN I FIND THE LIZARD WHAT ATE WHILTS I'M GIVIN HIM A 22-CALIBER COLONOSCOPY!
FIND 'IM? HOW YA GONNA TELL THOSE REPTAURS APART?
HE'S RIGHT! LET'S JUST BURN 'EM ALL!

OUR FIRST MISSION, AND IT WAS EVERYTHING WE'D EVER *DREAMED* IT WOULD BE. THE ONLY THING *MISSING* WAS A ROUSING SPEECH FROM OUR *FIELD COMMANDER*
FAT CHANCE OF *THAT*
HEARD THEIR BLOOD RUNS *COLD*, MAN! *COLD!*
YEAH, WELL
THEY'RE NOT *ALONE*
OUR *TARGETS*, OF COURSE, HAD NO IDEA WE WERE *COMING*
AS WE CAME IN FOR A *LANDING* AND STARTED PUTTING OURSELVES *TOGETHER*
THE *SAURIANS* WERE UNDERGOING THEIR *OWN* LITTLE RITUAL
<KYALHTUA BLESS THE HUNTERS, THAT THEY FIND BOUNTIFUL PREY>
<KYALHTUA BLESS THE PRINCE'S BLADE ON THIS, HIS FIRST HUNT DAY>
<KYALHTUA BLESS TH
<PLEASE WITH ALL DUE *RESPECT*, PRIEST>
<YOU'RE SCARING AWAY ALL THE *GAME*>
01

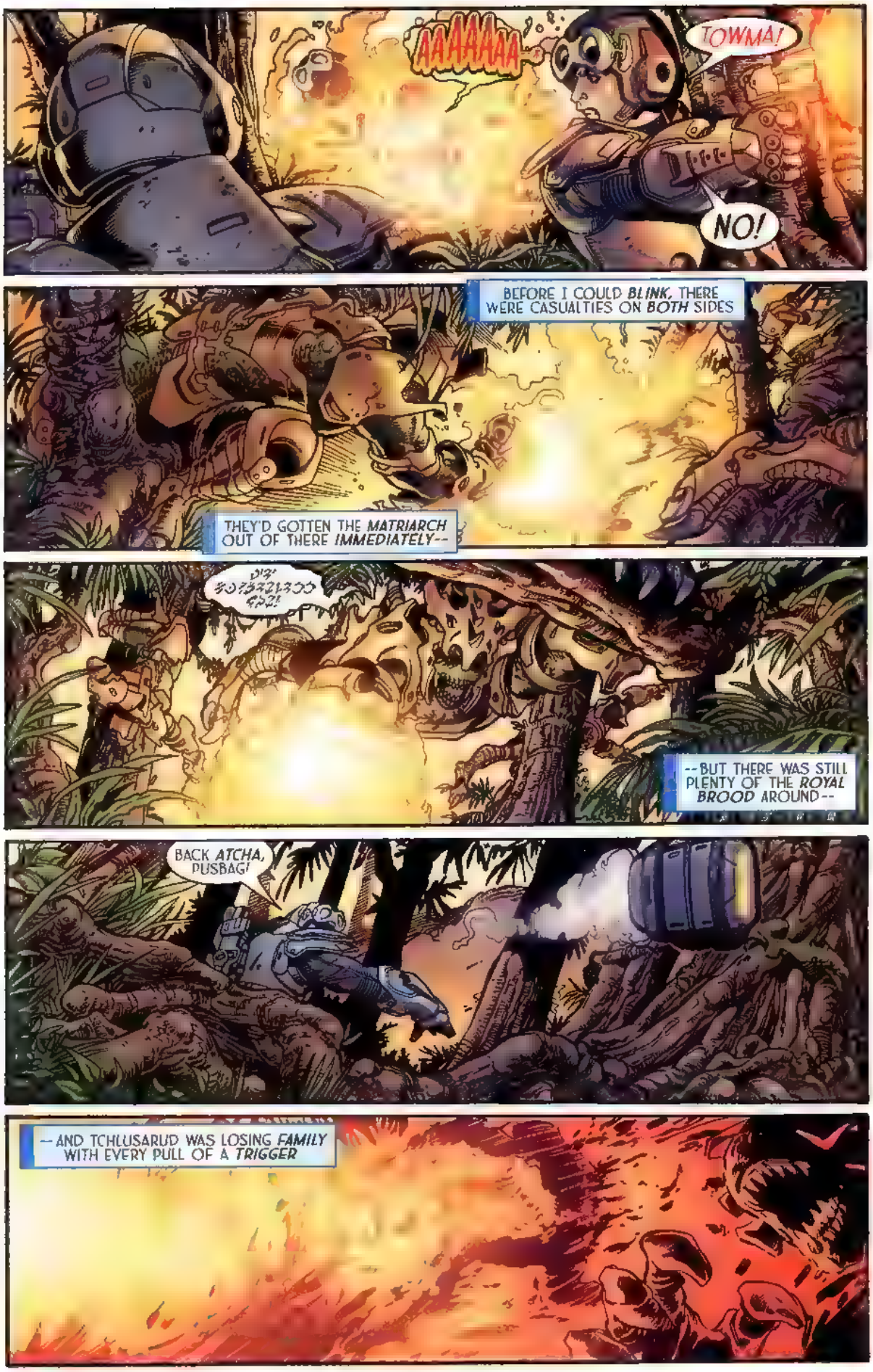
<HA! RELAX THOSE SCALES, TCHUSARUD! FIRST HUNT IS LIKE WADING THROUGH A POND!
<AT LEAST IT WAS FOR ME..
<I BROUGHT BACK A THAKASAUR SO BIG THAT NONE COULD DENY I WAS AT LAST AN ADULT...
<...WITH THE FULL RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES THEREOF, eh, CHARUUT?>
<HEH, HEH, HEH>
<TCHUXXAN, I--->
<STAY CALM, LITTLE BROTHER
<NO ONE'S EXPECTING YOU TO MATCH MY RECORD
<ALL I'M SAYING IS THAT I'M SURE YOU WON'T EMBARASS YOURSELF LIKE YOU GENERALLY DO>
<TCHUXXAN! STEP AWAY FROM YOUR BROTHER!
<I'LL NOT HAVE ANYTHING INTERFERE WITH MY YOUNGEST CHILD'S RITE OF MANHOOD!>

<HE WILL *NOT* FOUL THIS DAY, MOTHER
<NOT *THIS* DAY>
<TCHUXXAN, YOUR *OTHER* SIBLINGS ONLY *BARELY* MAINTAINED THEIR TEMPERS WITH YOU THROUGH THE YEARS
<IF YOU EXPECT *TCHLUSARUD* TO DO *LIKE-WISE*,
< YOU *MAY* BE *SURPRISED*
<YOU'RE *WELCOME* TO PUSH YOUR BROTHER IN WHATEVER DIRECTION YOU *LIKE*--
<--BUT BEAR IN MIND THAT IT'S THE CORNERED ANIMALS WHO FIGHT THE *FIERCEST*>
<THEN FIGHT HE SHALL, MATRIARCH. THERE IS SOMETHING *OUT* THERE>
<THANK YOU, HUNTGUIDE EVERYONE STAY *HERE*
<I WILL RETURN WITH THE *KILL*>
<JUST *REMEMBER*, BROTHER *INSECTS* DON'T *COUNT*
<*HAR!*>
I'M *IMAGINING* THE *CONVERSATION*, OF COURSE.
WITHOUT *TRANSLATORS*, THE MEANING WAS, *LOST*, SHALL WE SAY

THANKS TO DNA INGESTION, THE SAURIANS COULD UNDERSTAND OUR LANGUAGE BUT TO US, EVERY TIME THEY OPENED THEIR MAWS
THEY MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN CROCODILES WITH HEARTBURN
PLIP
BLOOP

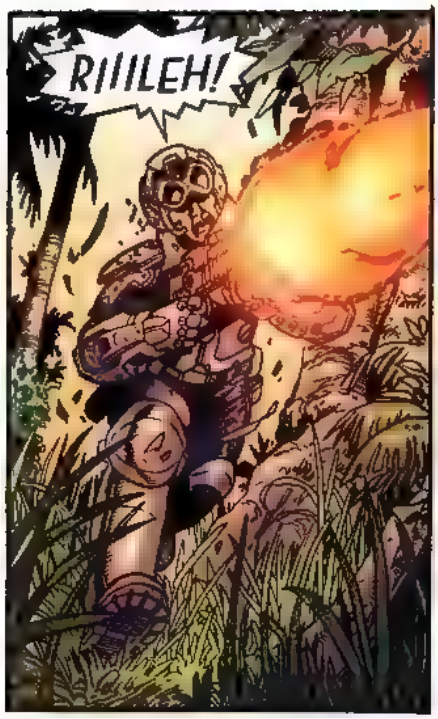
HSSSS
BRAKOW
BRAKOW
YAAAH!!
ZARAK
AIIEEE!
FACHOOM
Oh, SWEET GOD! THAT'S WHAT A PLASMA GUN CAN DO?
FIRE AT WILL!
BUDDABUDDABUDDA
BUDDABUDDA
DIZ!
MOTHER OF--!
FACHOOM

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT
FACHOOM
WE WERE IN TROUBLE
HOLY %*@!! I THOUGHT WE WERE SUPPOSED TO BE CRASHIN A RELIGIOUS CEREMONY!
HATE TA SEE WHAT THEY'RE PACKING WHEN THEY'RE NOT IN CHURCH!
BRAKOW BRAKOW
SO MUCH FOR OUR AMBUSH!
I'M THINK'N UNION INTELLIGENCE NEEDS TO WORK A LITTLE HARDER NEXT TIME, REY!
AGREED ATTACKING DURING A SAURIAN CEREMONY MADE SENSE
BUT MAYBE SOMEONE SHOULD HAVE TOLD US THEY'D BE CARRYING HUNTING WEAPONS?


AAAAAAA
TOWMA!
NO!
BEFORE I COULD BLINK, THERE WERE CASUALTIES ON BOTH SIDES
THEY'D GOTTEN THE MATRIARCH OUT OF THERE IMMEDIATELY--
--BUT THERE WAS STILL PLENTY OF THE ROYAL BROOD AROUND--
BACK ATCHA, PUSBAG!
--AND TCHLUSARUD WAS LOSING FAMILY WITH EVERY PULL OF A TRIGGER

FOUR HUNDRED YEARS WE'VE BEEN AT WAR WITH THE SAURIANS
FOUR CENTURIES DURING WHICH WE'D MADE LEAPS IN TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS AND CULTURAL ACHIEVEMENT
FOUR CENTURIES DURING WHICH WE'D ADVANCED UP THE EVOLUTIONARY LADDER .
ALL OF WHICH COUNTED FOR NOTHING THAT DAY
THAT AFTERNOON, WE WERE JUST MAMMALS AND REPTILES.
BURNING AND BLEEDING
AND PRAYING TO GODS WHO PROBABLY COULDN'T HAVE CARED LESS

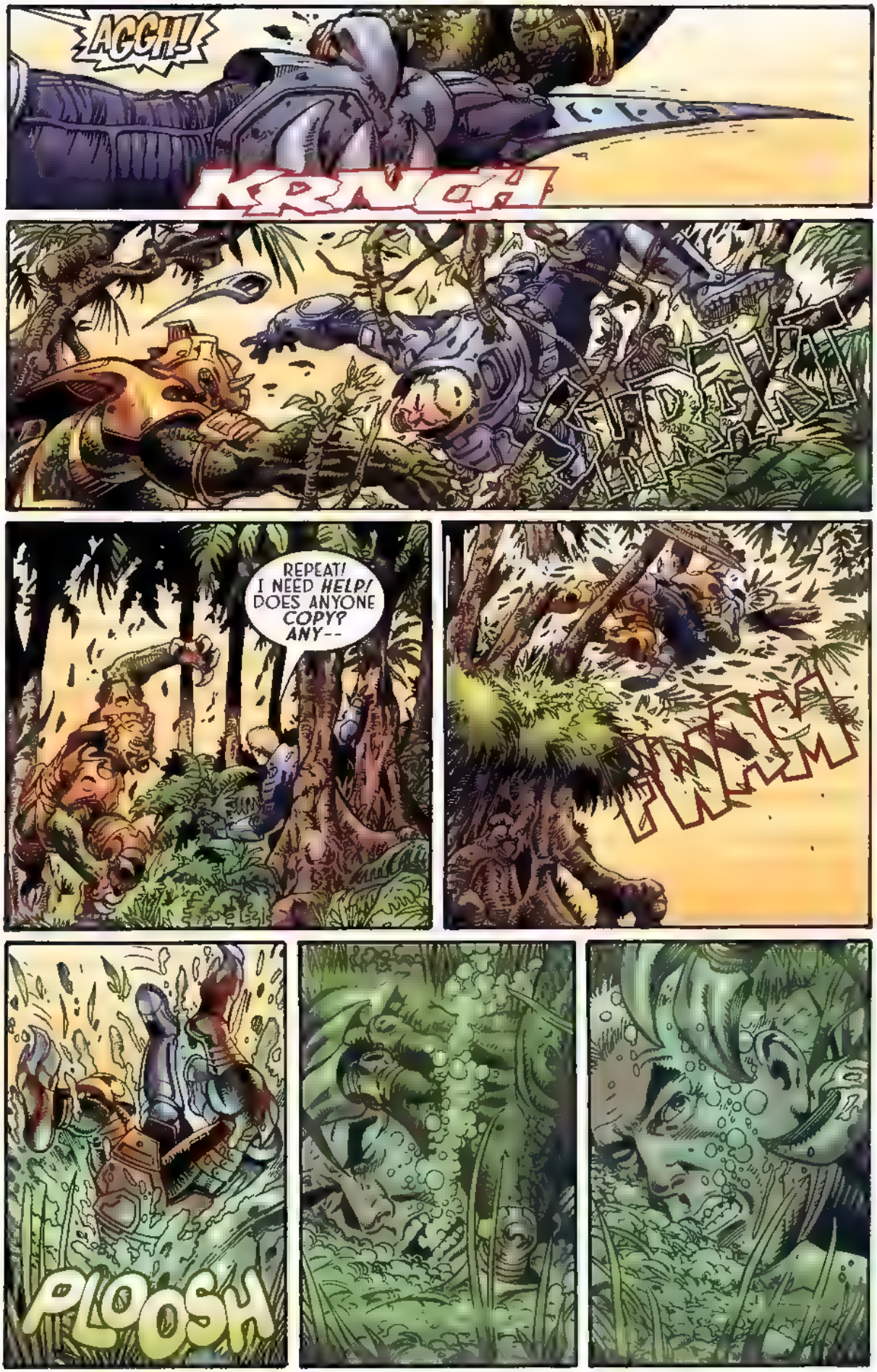
CHOK
BASTARD!
TELL ME, YOU CRAWLER! TELL ME WHO DID IT!
WHICH ONE OF YOU FREAKIN' ATE HIM?
WHO--?
PRIVATE RILEH! SHE'S
OH NO
I KNOW YOU CAN UNDERSTAND ME! ANSWER ME!
WHICH ONE OF YOU ATE SGT. WHILTS?
RILEH, BACK OFF! THOSE SACS AT HIS NECK -- THEY RE VENOM!
THEY'RE VENOM!
GHHUAAAAGH!



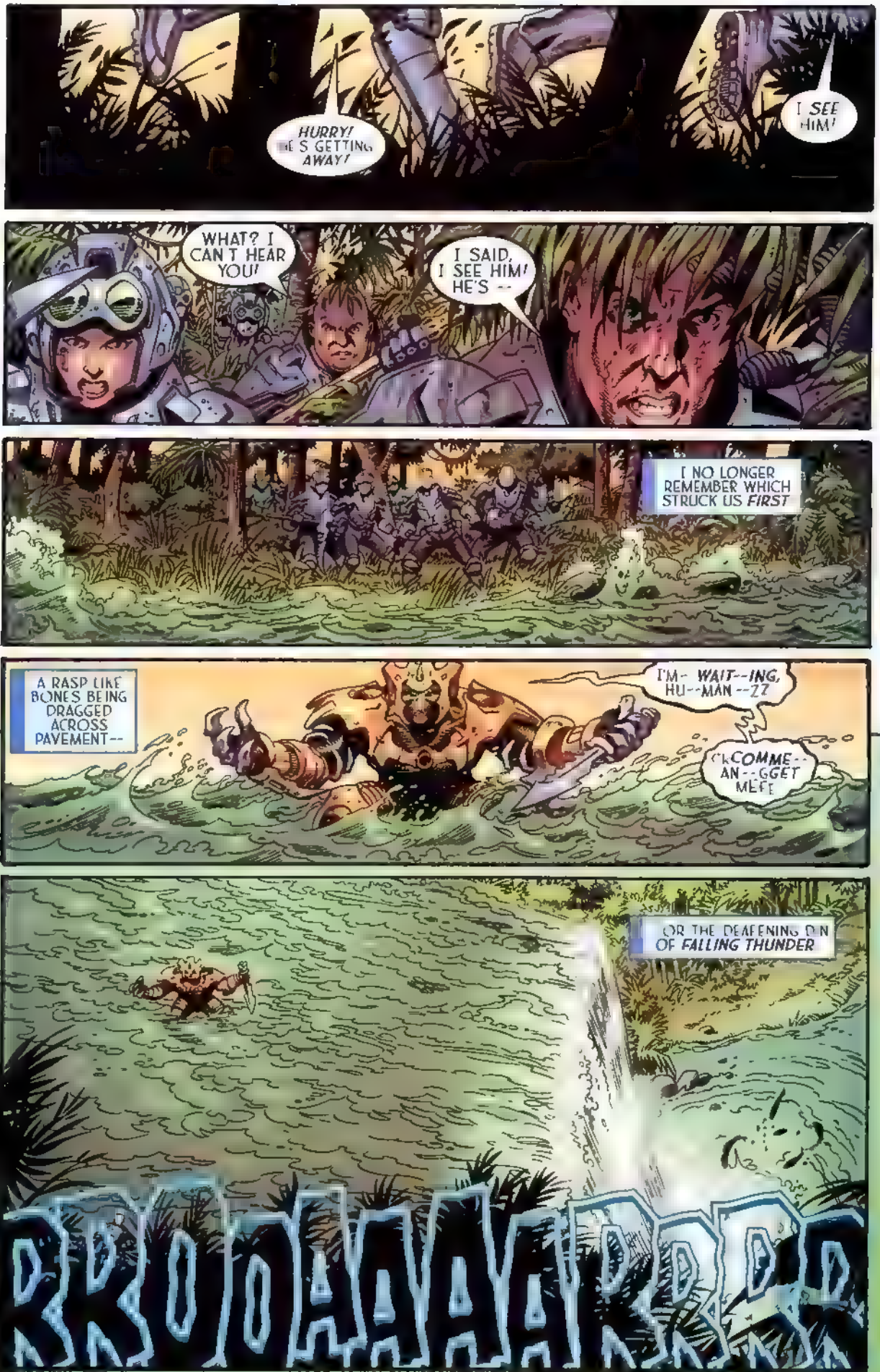
BRRR

SAURIAN CORPSES ALL AROUND BUT IN THE CONFUSION, WE'D OVERLOOKED SOMEONE SPECIFIC
THE HUNTER WHO'D LAIN IN WAITING FOR JUST THE RIGHT MOMENT TO STRIKE
HSSSSSSSSSS
TCHLUSARUD

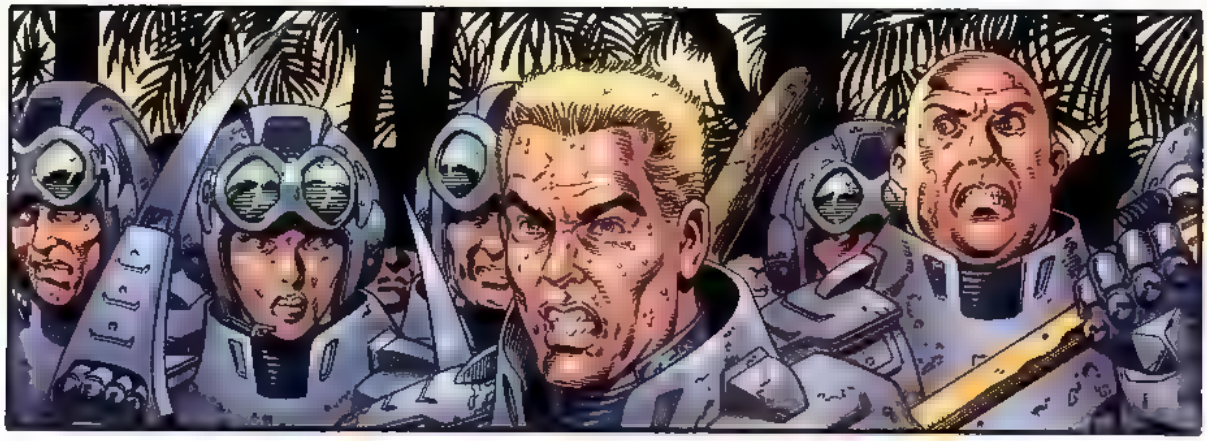
HALF HIS FAMILY WAS DEAD AT OUR HANDS
ONLY SAM'S ARMOR KEPT HIM FROM BEING KILLED WITH ONE BLOW
ANYBODY! I NEED BACKUP HERE!
KLIK KLIK KLIK
THEN AGAIN
SAM WASN'T EXACTLY IN THE BEST MOOD, EITHER
SKRAAK

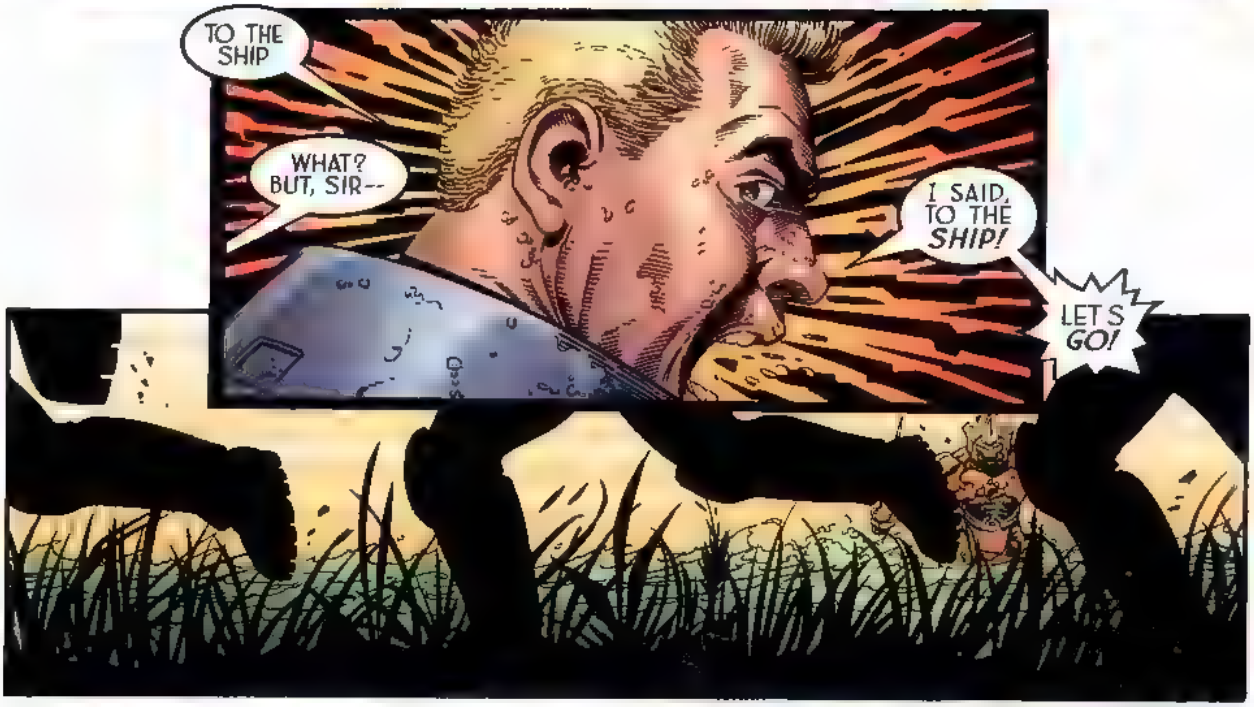

AGGH!
KRNCH
REPEAT! I NEED HELP! DOES ANYONE COPY? ANY--
PWAM
PLOOSH

SHKKKKOFF!
SAM LATER SAID HE COULDN'T BELIEVE HIS EYES
THE ONLY THING THAT SAVED HIM
WAS THAT TCHLUSARUD AND HIS BIG BROTHER WERE FIGHTING OVER WHO WOULD MAKE THE KILL!
THROW
DON'T JUST STAND THERE MEN! SHOOT TO KILL!
WITH WHAT? WE'RE OUT OF AMMO!
MAYBE, BUT IT'S STILL FIVE AGAINST ONE..
SO I SAY WE DO THIS THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY!


HURRY! HE'S GETTING AWAY!
I SEE HIM!
WHAT? I CAN'T HEAR YOU!
I SAID, I SEE HIM! HE'S --
I NO LONGER REMEMBER WHICH STRUCK US FIRST
A RASP LIKE BONES BEING DRAGGED ACROSS PAVEMENT--
I'M- WAIT--ING, HU--MAN --ZZ
COMME-- AN--GGET MEFE
OR THE DEAFENING DIN OF FALLING THUNDER
BROADSWORD

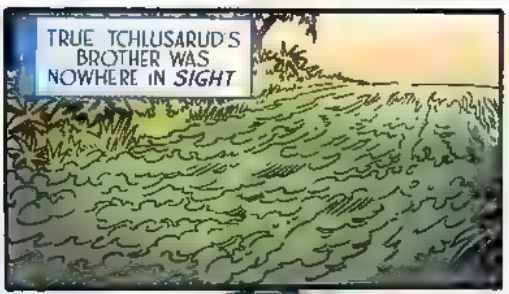
HSSSK
CHAAAH
YOU HEARD HIM! ON MY MARK --
NO
IT'S OVER
OVER? BUT, COMMANDER, WITH ALL DUE RESPECT--!
MISSION ACCOMPLISHED, FARQUAR! WE DELIVERED OUR MESSAGE TO THE ROYAL FAMILY --
BUT--
-AND THAT IS WHAT WE WERE SENT TO DO!
IT'S A TOUGH BREAK THAT WE WEREN'T 100% SUCCESSFUL --
-- BUT WHEN YOU'RE AS OUTMATCHED FROM THE GET-GO AS WE WERE, AN OUTCOME LIKE THIS IS INEVITABLE!
IF YOU EXPECTED DIFFERENT--
-- THAT Z? -- WHAT HAP-PENZZ--
-- WHEN YOU FIGHT GRAVITY



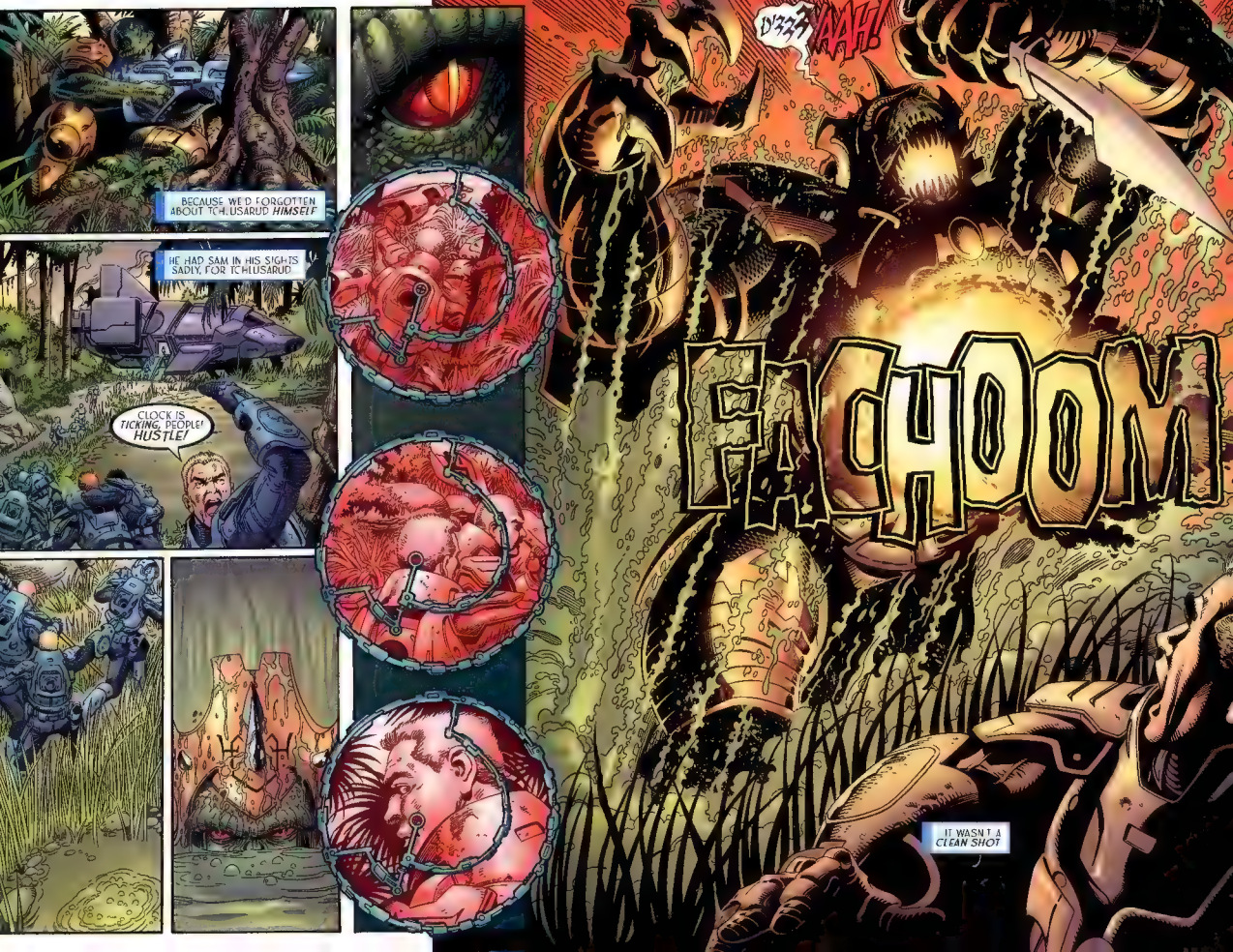

TO THE SHIP
WHAT? BUT, SIR--
I SAID, TO THE SHIP!
LET'S GO!

--HADDIM RIGHT WHERE WE--
MY KID SISTER'S BRAVER THAN

--FEEL LIKE PUKIN' HAD A RIFLE, I'D TAKE MY SHOT ANYWAY.
WOULDN'T DO YOU NO GOOD, FARQUAR UGLY DONE RUN OFF ALREADY

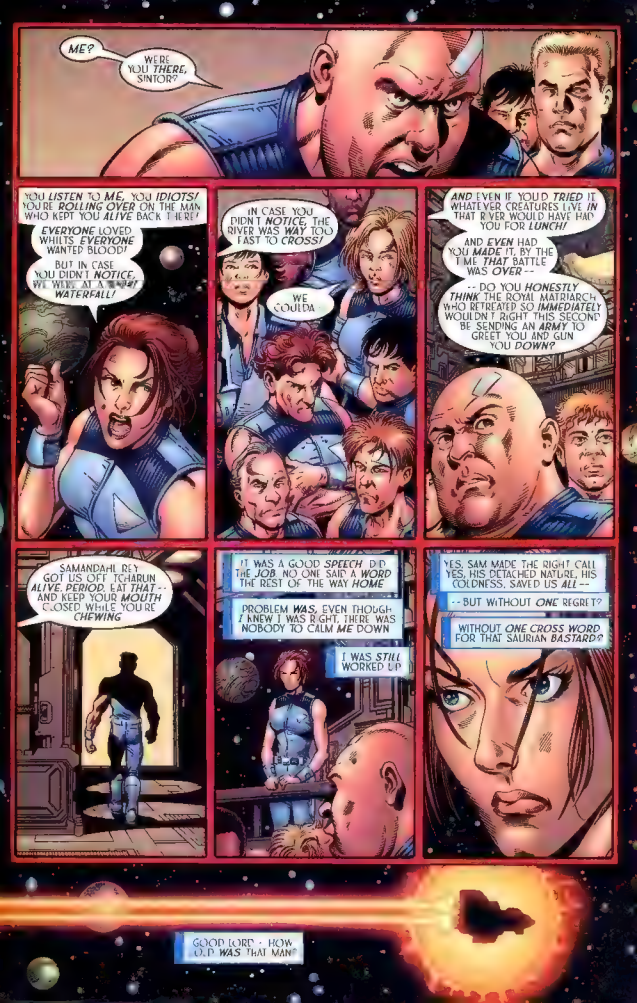

TRUE TCHLUSARUD'S BROTHER WAS NOWHERE IN SIGHT

WHICH LED US TO BELIEVE WE WERE HOME FREE


BECAUSE WE'D FORGOTTEN ABOUT TCHLUSARUD HIMSELF
HE HAD SAM IN HIS SIGHTS SADLY, FOR TCHLUSARUD
CLOCK IS TICKING, PEOPLE! HUSTLE!
AAH!
FA CHOOM
IT WASN'T A CLEAN SHOT

NOOOOOO!
TCHUXXAN! TCHUXXAN!
GO GO GO!
AS TCHUXXAN LAY DYING, HE UTTERED HIS LAST WORDS TO TCHLUSARUD
I'LL NEVER KNOW WHAT WAS SAID
KNOWING WHAT I KNOW NOW, IT'S POSSIBLE EVEN LIKELY THAT, RATHER THAN PLEADING FOR A QUICK DEATH, TCHUXXAN TAUNTED HIS BROTHER ONE LAST TIME

BUT I DOUBT IT
NEVER SEEN SUCH AN ACT OF *COWARDICE* IN MY WHOLE DAMN *LIFE!*
YOU *SUCK*, REY! WE HAD THAT MOTHERLOVER *DEAD SOLID COLD* -- AND YOU TURNED *AWAY!*
THAT WAS THE REPTAUR WHO *KILLED WHILTS*, YOU STUPID *S.O.B.!*
WE *ALL* WANTED A PIECE OF HIM FOR WHAT HE--
WE ALL *DESERVED* A PIECE OF HIM! OR DID YOU *FORGET* THAT?
MAYBE HE NEEDS TO BE *REMINDED*, HUH?
WHAT *ABOUT* IT *YELLOW*? YOU NEED TO BE *REMINDED*?
CAN'T *WAIT* TO RAT YOU OUT TO *GRANNART*, YOU *LOSER!* HE'LL BUST YOU *GOOD!*
WHADDAYA GOT T'SAY FOR YOURSELF BIG MAN? HUH? *HUH?*
NOTHIN'? 'COURSE, NOTHIN'! THERE AIN'T NO *DEFENSE* FOR SPITTIN' ON WHILTS *GRAVE* IS THERE? *IS THERE?!*
I SWEAR, WE OUGHTTA--
--*SHUT THE HELL UP!*
YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT *STUPID*, FARQUAR--
-LET'S START WITH *YOU!*


ME?
WERE YOU THERE, SINTOR?
YOU LISTEN TO ME, YOU IDIOTS! YOU'RE ROLLING OVER ON THE MAN WHO KEPT YOU ALIVE BACK THERE!
EVERYONE LOVED WHILTS. EVERYONE WANTED BLOOD!
BUT IN CASE YOU DIDN'T NOTICE, WE WERE AT A [illegible] WATERFALL!
IN CASE YOU DIDN'T NOTICE, THE RIVER WAS WAY TOO FAST TO CROSS!
WE COULDA
AND EVEN IF YOU'D TRIED IT, WHATEVER CREATURES LIVE IN THAT RIVER WOULD HAVE HAD YOU FOR LUNCH!
AND EVEN HAD YOU MADE IT, BY THE TIME THAT BATTLE WAS OVER--
-- DO YOU HONESTLY THINK THE ROYAL MATRIARCH WHO BETREATED SO IMMEDIATELY WOULDN'T RIGHT THIS SECOND BE SENDING AN ARMY TO GREET YOU AND GUN YOU DOWN?
SAMANDAHL REY GOT US OFF TCHARUN ALIVE, PERIOD. EAT THAT-- AND KEEP YOUR MOUTH CLOSED WHILE YOU'RE CHEWING
IT WAS A GOOD SPEECH. DID THE JOB. NO ONE SAID A WORD THE REST OF THE WAY HOME
PROBLEM WAS, EVEN THOUGH I KNEW I WAS RIGHT, THERE WAS NOBODY TO CALM ME DOWN
I WAS STILL WORKED UP
YES, SAM MADE THE RIGHT CALL. YES, HIS DETACHED NATURE, HIS COLDNESS, SAVED US ALL--
-- BUT WITHOUT ONE REGRET?
WITHOUT ONE CROSS WORD FOR THAT SAURIAN BASTARD?
GOOD LORD - HOW OLD WAS THAT MAN?

BY THE TIME WE WERE BACK AT *HEADQUARTERS*, I'D DECIDED - FIELD COMMANDER OR *NO*--TO GIVE SAM A PIECE OF MY *MIND*
I HAD TO KNOW ONCE AND FOR *ALL*
HOW COULD HE *NOT CARE* ABOUT WHITTS?
HOW COULD HE HAVE THAT SMALL A *SOUL*?
HOW

YOUR POINT BEING ?
THAT WHEN PEOPLE CALL SAM INSCRUTABLE, IT'S REALLY NOT A COMPLIMENT?
THAT WE REALLY NEED SOME PLASMA WEAPONS?
THAT THE NEXT TIME SAM TEASES YOU BY FEEDING HALF A CRUNCHPUFF TO THE PSEUDOSAUR, YOU'RE GOING TO PLUNGE OUR SHIP INTO A WHITE DWARF STAR?
NO NO
YES

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Magic rules

on the planet Ciress, literally. A world where magic is an everyday occurrence, Ciress has long been under the sovereignty of the Major Guilds, a confederation of seven schools of magic: **Nouveau, Dark Magi, Djinn, Enchantress, Astral, Shaman** and **Tantric.**

Each Guild is presided over by a Guild Master who serves as a living receptacle for that Guild's eternal spirit and arcane knowledge. Or at least the masters served as living receptacles until **Giselle Villard**, a socialite more interested in the party life than magical concerns, was graced with a Sigil. The mysterious mark of power attracted all seven eternal spirits to her, making her the most powerful Mystic her world had ever seen. Complicating matters, the spirit of the Nouveau Guild should have gone to Giselle's sister, **Genevieve**, who had fulfilled her lifelong goal by being named Guild Master.

As far as the public is concerned, the Guild Masters remain in their positions of power. But secretly Giselle is shouldering the burden of being magical protector of Ciress. Giselle survived her sternest test by defending her world from the return of **Animora**, a powerful and evil entity. It was, in fact, Animora's second attempt to dominate Ciress. Every school child learns the tale of how Animora was thwarted by the gathered Guild Masters more than five hundred years ago.

Only it's not true.

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WHAT'S THIS?
WHAT'S WHAT?
THIS ONE HERE
Oh, THAT
HARDY HAR
LOOKS IMPORTANT
THAT'S A BOOK
COME ON, WHAT IS IT? THIS IS THE GUILD MASTER'S PRIVATE STUDY

SO YOU MUST KNOW GEN
THIS IS THE GUILD MASTER'S PRIVATE STUDY SO TECHNICALLY YOU SHOULDN'T EVEN BE HERE
TECHNICALLY
EVER SINCE I GOT THE SIGIL
YOOCH!
I HAVE ALL THE GUILD SPIRITS ROLLING AROUND IN MY HEAD
SO I'VE REALLY GOT AS MUCH RIGHT AS YOU
You have awakened a slumbering giant! Beware my wrath!
SERIOUSLY GEN, WHAT IS THIS?
A MEMOIR
BY SCAVAL ER

IT RECOUNTS WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE GUILD MASTERS FACED ANIMORA THE FIRST TIME
FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO?
EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT STORY IT'S PRACTICALLY THE FIRST THING THEY TEACH US IN SCHOOL
THIS ISN'T THE STORY THEY TAUGHT YOU IN SCHOO. OPEN IT, IF YOU REALLY HAVE TO
I DEFEATED ANIMORA WHEN SHE RETURNED IF THERE'S MORE TO KNOW ABOUT HER I'D LIKE –
THERE'S NO NEED FOR YOU TO READ ABOUT IT, GISELLE
LeCAVALIER?
YOU'RE CHARGED WITH BEING THE MYSTIC PROTECTOR OF CIRESS
THIS IS A STORY YOU SHOULD HEAR
FIVE CENTURIES AGO I WAS AS YOU ARE
FLESH AND BLOOD RATHER THAN THIS SPIRIT FORM I HOLD NOW
I'D BEEN MASTER OF THE NOUVEAU GUILD FOR A DECADE
CIRESS WAS THE SAME MAGICAL WORLD THEN AS IT IS NOW

BUT IT WAS A WORLD AT WAR. THE MAJOR GUILDS AND THEIR VARIOUS MASTERS LOCKED IN A CONSTANT STATE OF CONFLICT.
TED NOUVEAU
MANDORA OF SHAMAN
MAGUS OF DARK MAGI. OF COURSE
THERE WAS AUNMAI OF ENCHANTRESS
JINAI OF DJINN
ADAYA OF ASTRAL
HEROTUS OF TANTRIC
AND NALIA OF TAROC

BUT IT WAS A WORLD AT WAR THE MAJOR GUILDS AND THEIR VARIOUS MASTERS LOCKED IN A CONSTANT STATE OF CONFLICT
TIED NOUVEAU
THERE WAS AUNMA OF ENCHANTRESS
JINA OF DJINN
HEROTUS OF TANTRIC

MINDOKA
SHAMAN
MAGUS OF
DARK MAGI,
OF COURSE
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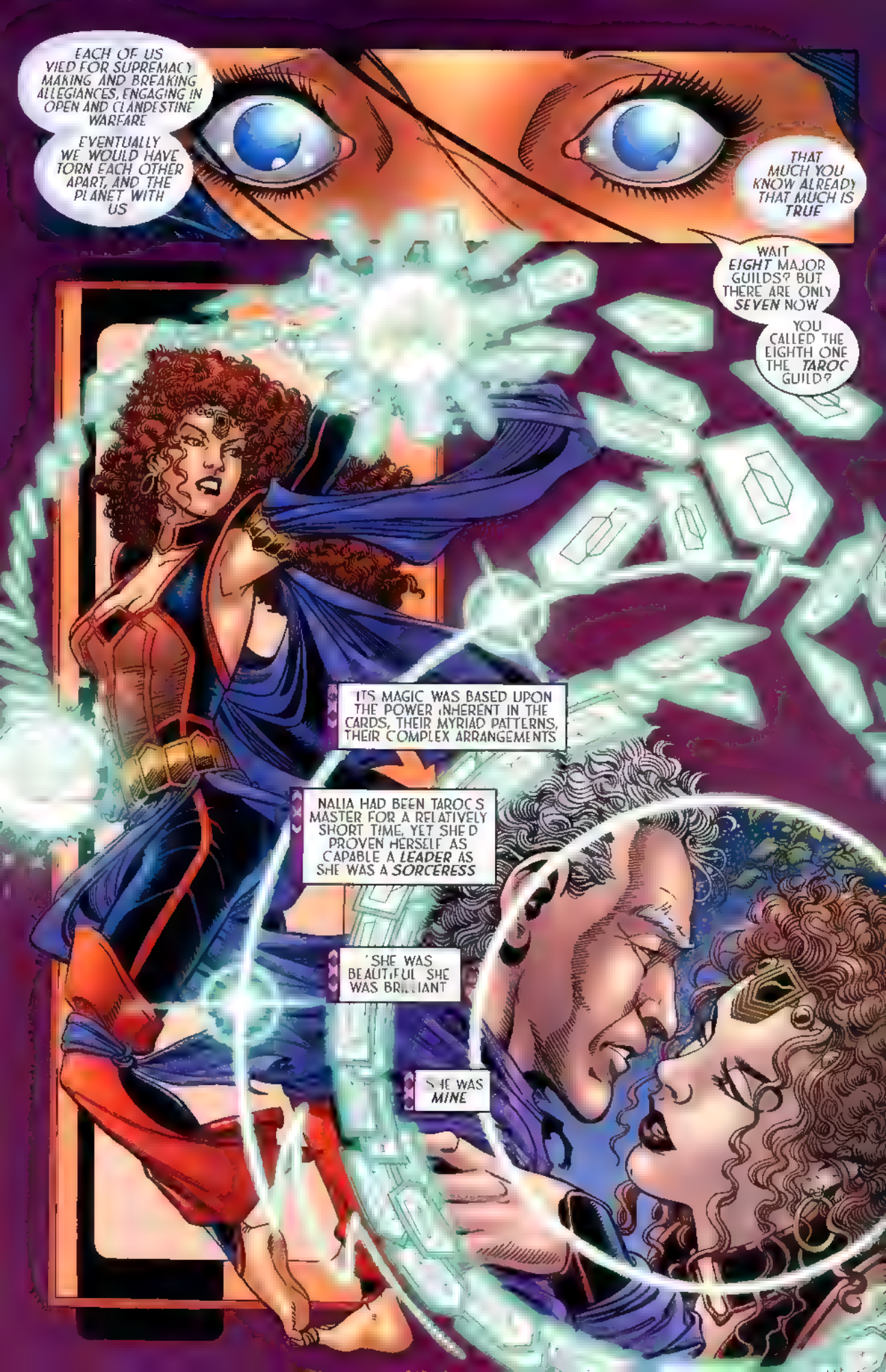
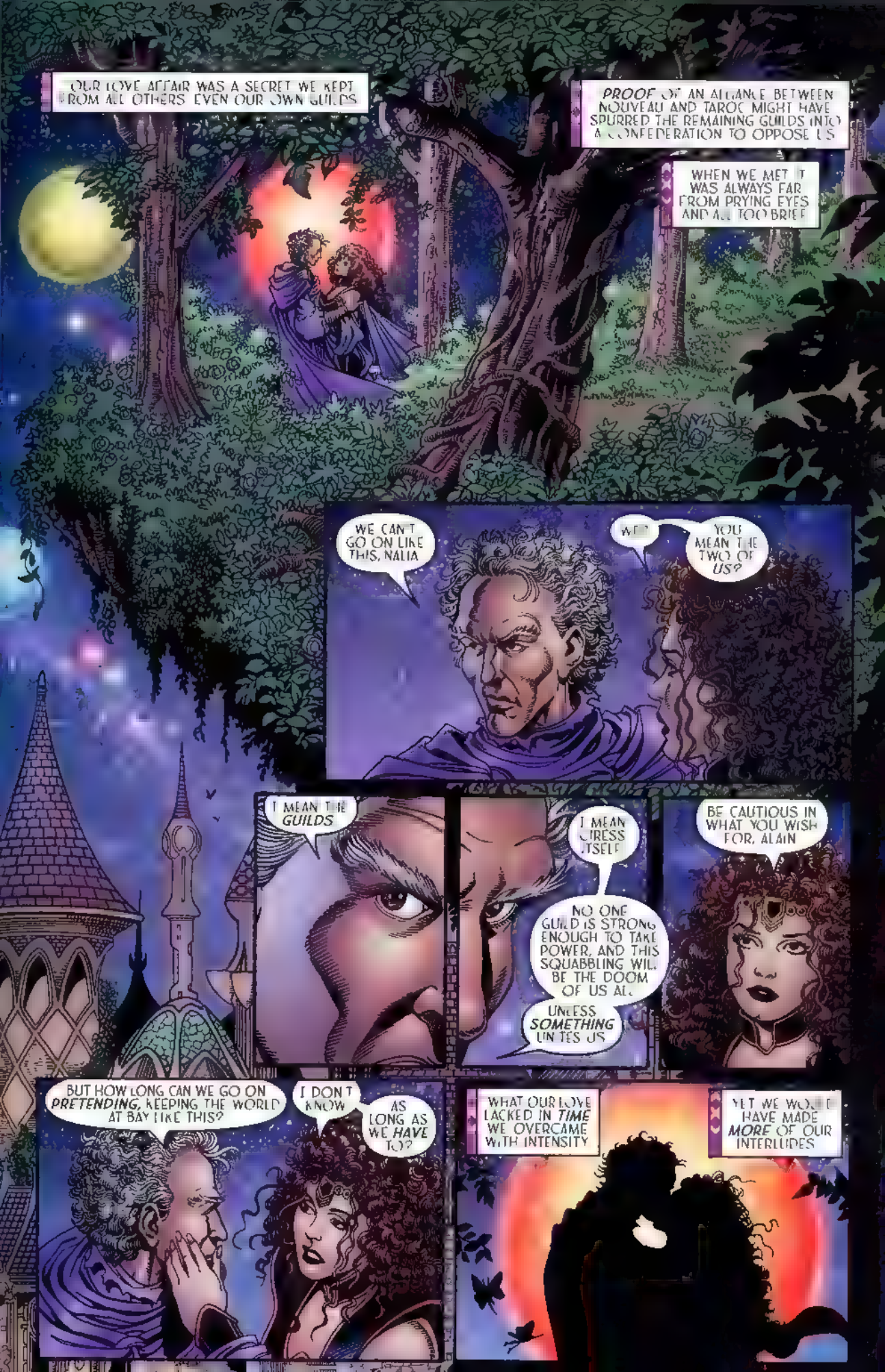
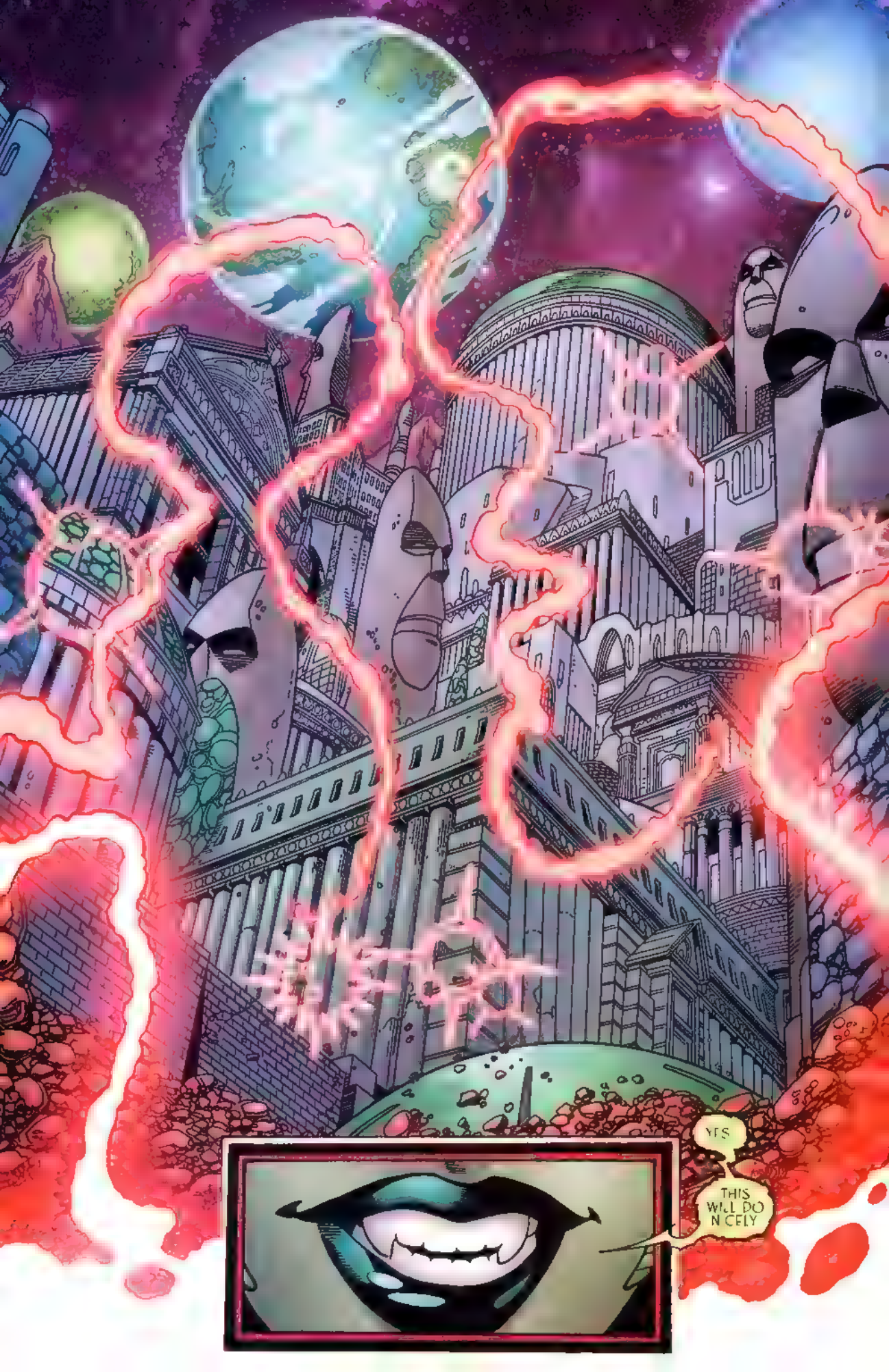
ASTRAL
AND NALIA

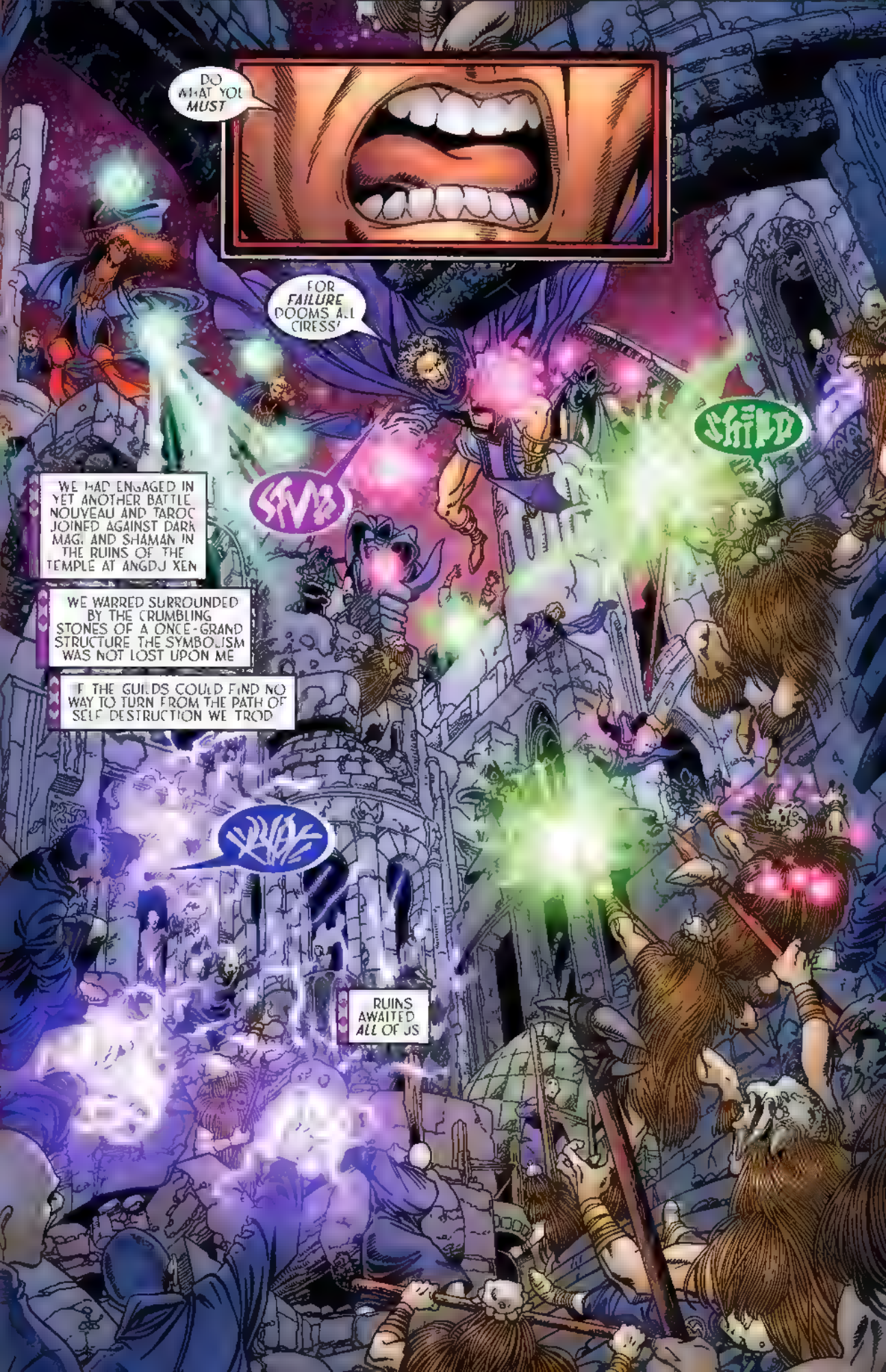

EACH OF US VIED FOR SUPREMACY, MAKING AND BREAKING ALLEGIANCES, ENGAGING IN OPEN AND CLANDESTINE WARFARE
EVENTUALLY WE WOULD HAVE TORN EACH OTHER APART, AND THE PLANET WITH US
THAT MUCH YOU KNOW ALREADY. THAT MUCH IS TRUE
WAIT. EIGHT MAJOR GUILDS? BUT THERE ARE ONLY SEVEN NOW
YOU CALLED THE EIGHTH ONE THE TAROC GUILD?
ITS MAGIC WAS BASED UPON THE POWER INHERENT IN THE CARDS, THEIR MYRIAD PATTERNS, THEIR COMPLEX ARRANGEMENTS
NALIA HAD BEEN TAROC'S MASTER FOR A RELATIVELY SHORT TIME, YET SHE'D PROVEN HERSELF AS CAPABLE A LEADER AS SHE WAS A SORCERESS
SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL. SHE WAS BRILLIANT
SHE WAS MINE


OUR LOVE AFFAIR WAS A SECRET WE KEPT FROM ALL OTHERS EVEN OUR OWN GUILDS
PROOF OF AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN NOUVEAU AND TAROC MIGHT HAVE SPURRED THE REMAINING GUILDS INTO A CONFEDERATION TO OPPOSE US
WHEN WE MET IT WAS ALWAYS FAR FROM PRYING EYES AND ALL TOO BRIEF
WE CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS, NALIA
WE?
YOU MEAN THE TWO OF US?
I MEAN THE GUILDS
I MEAN STRESS ITSELF
NO ONE GUILD IS STRONG ENOUGH TO TAKE POWER, AND THIS SQUABBLING WILL BE THE DOOM OF US ALL
UNLESS SOMETHING UNITES US
BE CAUTIOUS IN WHAT YOU WISH FOR, ALAIN
BUT HOW LONG CAN WE GO ON PRETENDING, KEEPING THE WORLD AT BAY LIKE THIS?
I DON'T KNOW
AS LONG AS WE HAVE TO?
WHAT OUR LOVE LACKED IN TIME WE OVERCAME WITH INTENSITY
YET WE WOULD HAVE MADE MORE OF OUR INTERLUDES

HAD WE KNOWN OF THE MALIGN PRESENCE UPON OUR THIRD MOON REGARDING OUR WORLD WITH A BALEFUL EYE

THRUNCH
RRRRR
THRUNCH

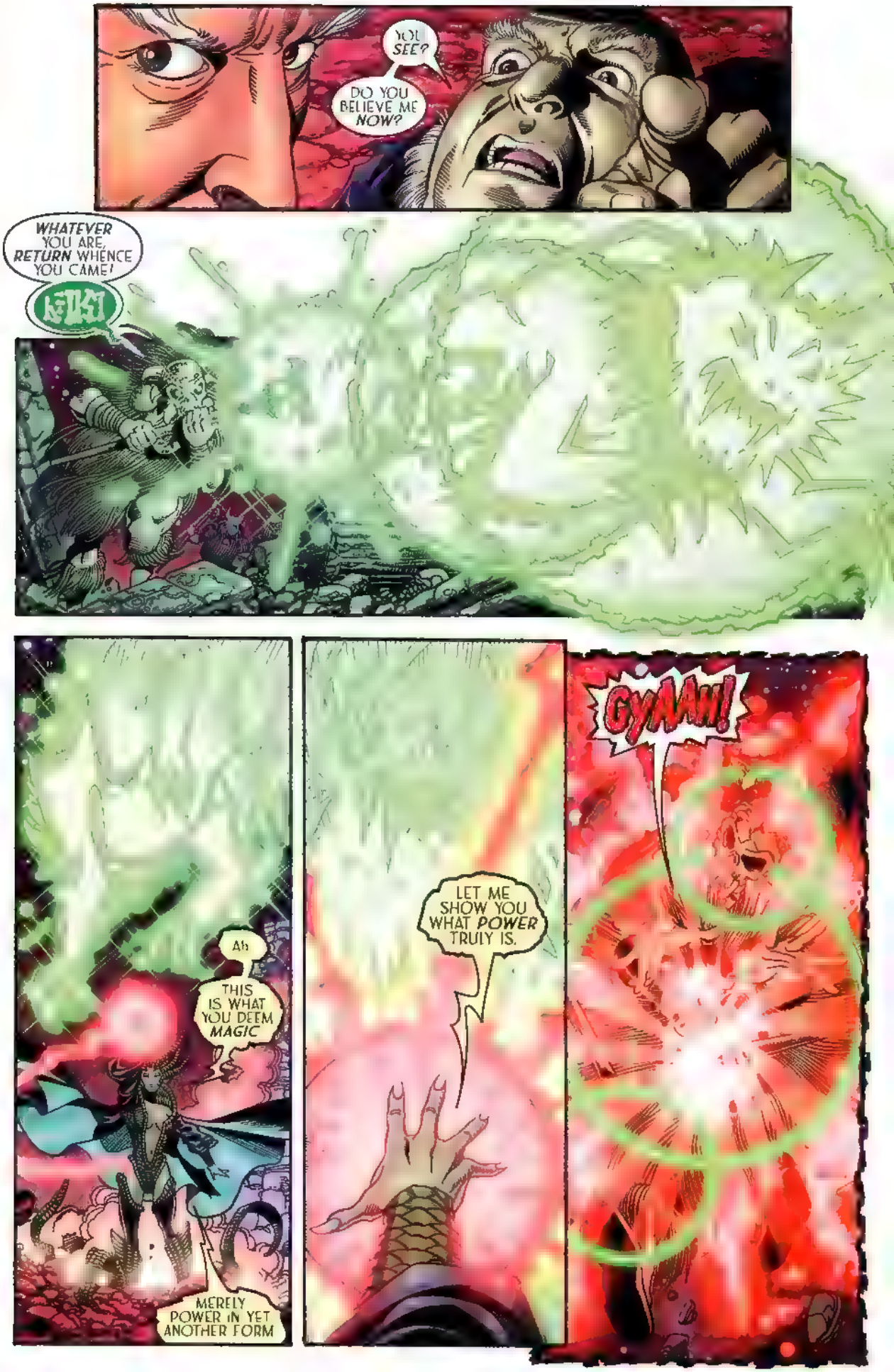

YES
THIS WILL DO NICELY


DO WHAT YOU MUST
FOR FAILURE DOOMS ALL CIRESS!
SHIELD
WE HAD ENGAGED IN YET ANOTHER BATTLE NOUVEAU AND TAROC JOINED AGAINST DARK MAGI AND SHAMAN IN THE RUINS OF THE TEMPLE AT ANGDJ XEN
WE WARRED SURROUNDED BY THE CRUMBLING STONES OF A ONCE-GRAND STRUCTURE THE SYMBOLISM WAS NOT LOST UPON ME
IF THE GUILDS COULD FIND NO WAY TO TURN FROM THE PATH OF SELF DESTRUCTION WE TROD
RUINS AWAITED ALL OF US

MUCH OF THE CONFLICT WAS ROOTED IN THE AGE OLD ANIMOSITY BETWEEN NOUVEAU AND DARK MAGI
WE SHARE BORDERS YET OUR MAGICS COULD NOT BE MORE AT ODDS
WE DRAW FROM THE LIGHT
GAH!
WHILE THEY BASE THEIR POWER UPON BLOOD AND DARKNESS
THE DARK MAGI WILL RULE THIS WORLD!
OURS WAS A HATRED SO ANCIENT AND STRONG
YOU DAMNED FOOL. THERE WON'T BE A WORLD LEFT TO RULE!
THAT IT REDUCED TWO OF THE MOST POWERFUL MAGES ON THE PLANET TO ANIMALS SQUABBLING IN THE DUST
NOUVEAU WON'T BE LEFT TO -
FTCH

WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE*, MAGUS?
EACH OF US HAD TRUCKED WITH DEMONS, SPIRITS OF THE AIR, ALL MANNER OF BEINGS FROM DIMENSIONS FAR REMOVED FROM OUR OWN
WE REGULARLY DEALT WITH CREATURES OF SUCH EVIL THEY WOULD RIP THE SOULS FROM THE UNPROTECTED SIMPLY TO SEE THEM SHRIVEL AND DIE
YET *NONE* OF US, NOT IN ALL OUR MYRIAD SORCEROUS EXPERIENCES
NOTHING
NOTHING
THIS IS NOT MY DOING

HAD EVER COME INTO CONTACT WITH ANYTHING REMOTELY LIKE *HER*
WELL
THIS *IS* A DREARY LITTLE SPECK


YOU SEE?
DO YOU BELIEVE ME NOW?
WHATEVER YOU ARE, RETURN WHENCE YOU CAME!
KRSH
Ah
THIS IS WHAT YOU DEEM MAGIC
MERELY POWER IN YET ANOTHER FORM
LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT POWER TRULY IS.
GYAAH!

MASTER?
MASTER MINDORA?
ANY ONE ELSE CARE TO TRY?
I TAKE IT YOU ARE THIS WORLD'S LEADERS
WHO ARE YOU?
I AM ANIMORA.
I AM YOUR MASTER.
I'VE LOOKED DOWN FROM YOUR MOON AND WATCHED YOUR LITTLE BLUE PLANET IT SITS AT A NEXUS WHERE THE UNIVERSE'S ENERGIES CONVERGE.
I'LL MAKE USE OF ALL THE POWER AND POTENTIAL THAT SWIRLS HERE
I'VE BEEN SO LONG RECOUPING MY STRENGTH AFTER MY BANISHMENT. NOW YOUR WORLD WILL SERVE AS MY BATTERY...
PAVING A WAY HOME FOR ME TO EXACT MY REVENGE UPON THOSE WHO EXILED ME

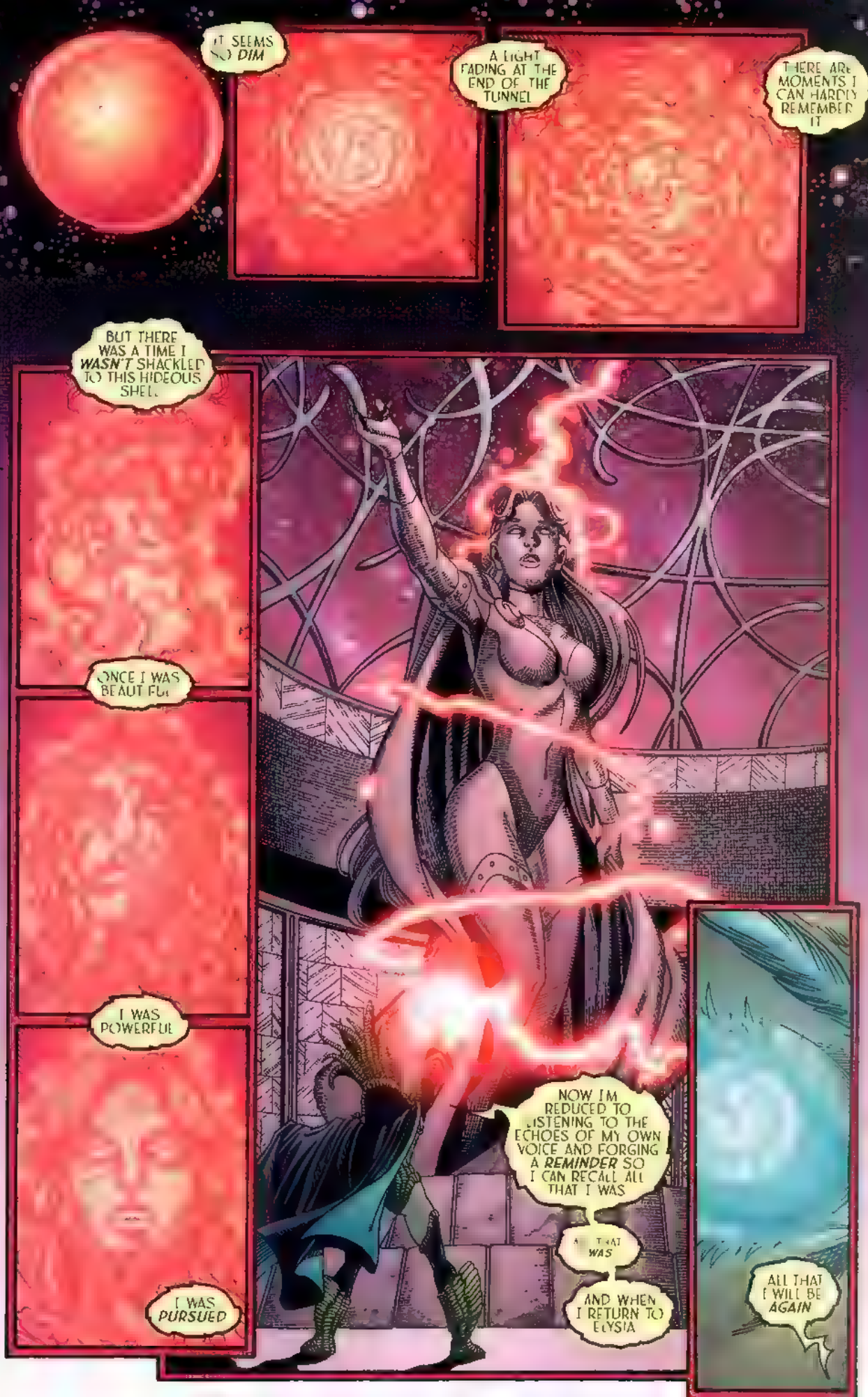
BUT WHY HAVE YOU COME TO CIRESS?
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
CIRESS IS WHAT I WANT
I'LL TAKE IT IF YOU FORCE ME, BUT I'D PREFER TO AVOID EXPENDING ENERGIES BETTER SPENT ELSEWHERE
MAKE NO MISTAKE, THOUGH THIS PLANET IS MINE TURN IT OVER TO ME
OR I'LL DESTROY EVERY LIVING THING ON IT
YOU HAVE ONE DAY TO MAKE YOUR DECISION
WE NEED TO SUMMON THE OTHER MASTERS

AND SO WE MET GATHERING AMONG THE RUINS
EIGHT PEOPLE WHO OTHERWISE WOULDN'T BE IN THE SAME PLACE EXCEPT TO *KILL* ONE ANOTHER
WHAT ASSURANCE DO WE HAVE THAT THIS ISN'T A *TRICK*?
YOU FOUR COULD HAVE FORMED A SECRET ALLIANCE AND CONCOCTED THIS TALE TO LURE US IN
YOU SEE PLOTS WITHIN PLOTS, ALINMA! AS ALWAYS TELL ME
DOES *HE* LOOK LIKE A TRICK?
MY NURIES SHOULD BE ALL THE PROOF YOU REQUIRE
I HAVE ATTESTED TO THE TALE AS WELL.
DO *ANY* OF YOU BELIEVE I WOULD MAKE PEACE WITH LeCAVALIER IF ANYTHING LESS THAN OUR *WORLD* WERE AT STAKE?
YOURS IS A GUILD *FOUNDED* UPON LIES, MAGUS. YET NOW YOU EXPECT US TO TAKE YOU AT YOUR WORD?
HEROTUS ECHOES *MY* SUSPICIONS. THIS SMACKS OF A CONSPIRACY
EVERYTHING SMACKS OF A CONSPIRACY TO YOU, CRONE! JUST *ONCE* CAN'T YOU

ENOUGH!
WHAT IS IT YOU WANT?
TO CONTINUE THIS POINTLESS BICKERING?
OR TO GIVE CIRESS A CHANCE OF SURVIVAL BY PUTTING ASIDE YOUR PETTY DIFFERENCES?
SUCH A THING HAS NEVER HAPPENED
IT MUST HAPPEN
OR WE DAMN THE VERY WORLD WE ARE SUPPOSED TO PROTECT
WE MASTERS MUST POOL OUR STRENGTHS IF ANMORA IS TO BE DEFEATED
I SUSPECT SHE'S TOO POWERFUL TO BE DESTROYED
BUT I BELIEVE WE COULD CAGE HER
A SPELL OF IMPRISONMENT? WHERE WOULD WE PLAY IT?
WHERE ANMORA LEAST EXPECTS IT
WE COULD OPEN A PORTAL TO A NULL VOID EVEN SHE COULDN'T ESCAPE FROM THAT
BUT WE WOULD NEED A SPELL ANCHOR TO BE CERTAIN OF SUCCESS
HE'S RIGHT ONE OF US WOULD HAVE TO BE WITHIN THE TRAP TO SEE THAT IT'S SPRUNG PROPERLY
THAT'S A SUICIDE ERRAND
WHAT OTHER CHOICE IS THERE? IF ONE OF US MUST BE SACRIFICED SO CIRESS MAY LIVE SO BE IT
BUT WHICH ONE?

WE DECIDE BY CHANCE
THE BACKS IDENTICAL
ON THE FACE SEVEN SAFE CARDS AND ONE DEATH'S HEAD
WHOEVER CHOOSES THE DEATH'S HEAD
SERVES AS THE SPELL ANCHOR
MAGUS?
CARE TO DRAW FIRST?
HOW DO WE KNOW YOU WON'T CHANGE THE CARDS TO PROTECT YOURSELF?
BECAUSE I TELL YOU I WON'T OUR TRUST IN ONE ANOTHER BEGINS HERE
SAFE

YOU CHOOSE NALIA
THEY'RE MY CARDS AGAIN
I'LL TAKE THE ONE THAT REMAINS
SAFE?
THE DEATH'S HEAD
THEN IT'S DECIDED
THE DUTY FALLS TO YOU
WHY?


IT SEEMS SO DIM
A LIGHT FADING AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL
THERE ARE MOMENTS I CAN HARDLY REMEMBER IT
BUT THERE WAS A TIME I WASN'T SHACKLED TO THIS HIDEOUS SHELL
ONCE I WAS BEAUTIFUL
I WAS POWERFUL
I WAS PURSUED
NOW I'M REDUCED TO LISTENING TO THE ECHOES OF MY OWN VOICE AND FORGING A REMINDER SO I CAN RECALL ALL THAT I WAS
ALL THAT WAS
AND WHEN I RETURN TO ELYSIA
ALL THAT I WILL BE AGAIN

SKRAAAK!
THIS IS YOUR ANSWER THEN?
NO
THIS IS OUR ANSWER

SURPRISE WORKED TO OUR ADVANTAGE. WE HAD THAT MUCH, AT LEAST
ANIMORA NEVER EXPECTED US TO FIGHT. WE WERE INSIGNIFICANT TO HER.
CREATURES SO FAR BELOW HER STATION THAT SHE NEVER CONSIDERED US ANY SORT OF THREAT.
IN HER MIND, HOW COULD WE PRESUME TO MATCH HER, MUCH LESS DEFEAT HER?
WHICH WAS TRUE OF COURSE.
WE WERE THE MOST POWERFUL BEINGS UPON OUR WORLD. MASTER SORCERERS A...
TOGETHER WE UNLEASHED A MAGICAL ONSLAUGHT AS HAD NEVER BEEN SEEN.
YET OUR COMBINED MIGHT WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A NUISANCE TO HER.
WE PRESSED OUR ATTACK MOMENTARILY FLUSH WITH INITIAL SUCCESS.
AND ANIMORA RECOVERED AS IF WE'D BARELY STUNG HER.
IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THE MAJOR GUILDS HAD EVER BEEN UNITED IN ANYTHING.
WE WERE UNITED IN UTTER DEFEAT.

SURPRISE WORKED TO OUR ADVANTAGE WE HAD THAT MUCH AT LEAST
ANIMORA NEVER EXPECTED US TO FIGHT WE WERE INSIGNIFICANT TO HER
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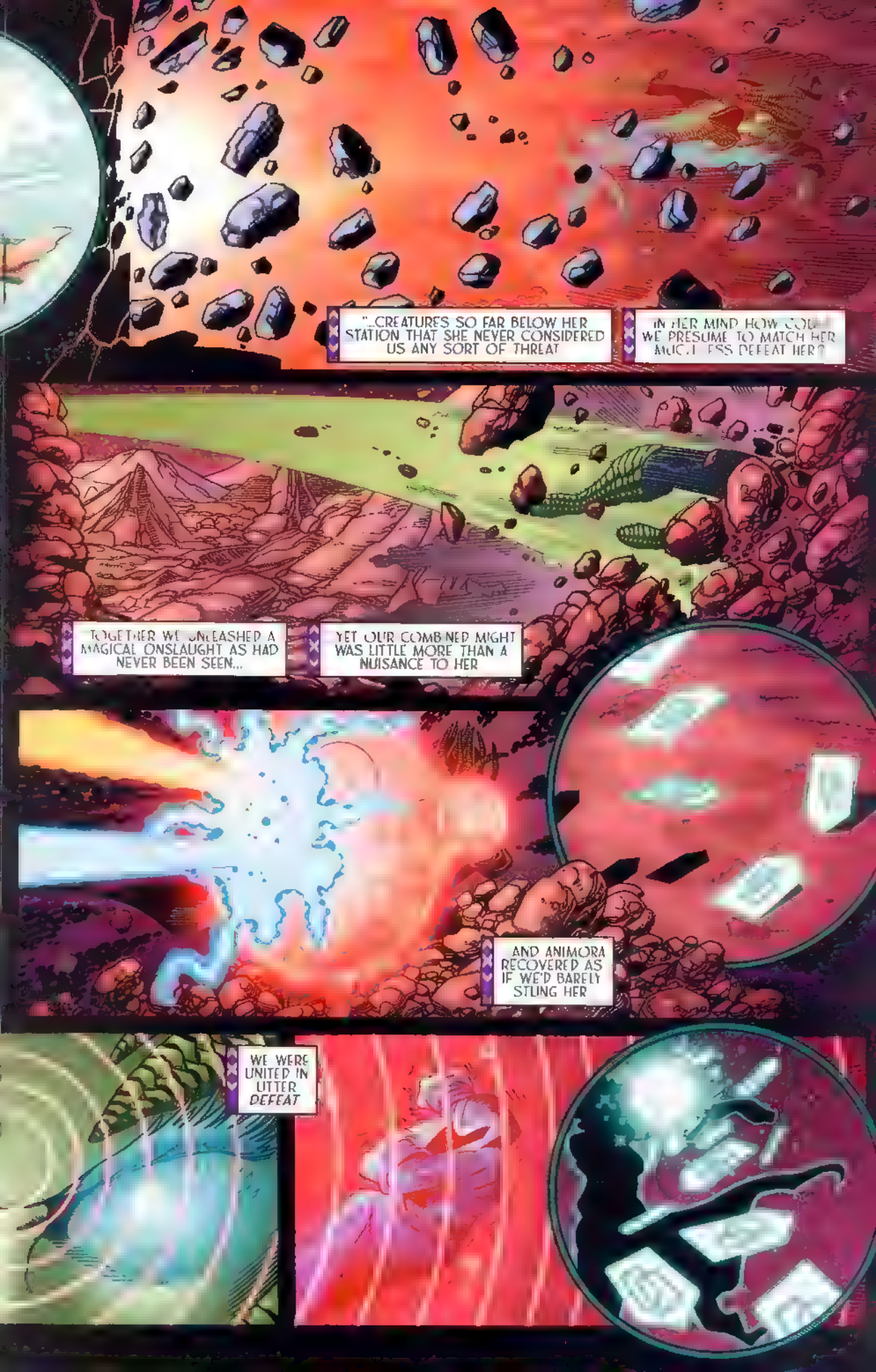

"...CREATURES SO FAR BELOW HER STATION THAT SHE NEVER CONSIDERED US ANY SORT OF THREAT
IN HER MIND HOW COULD WE PRESUME TO MATCH HER MAGICAL PROWESS? DEFEAT HER?
TOGETHER WE UNLEASHED A MAGICAL ONSLAUGHT AS HAD NEVER BEEN SEEN...
YET OUR COMBINED MIGHT WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A NUISANCE TO HER
AND ANIMORA RECOVERED AS IF WE'D BARELY STUNG HER
WE WERE UNITED IN UTTER DEFEAT

ONE AFTER ANOTHER WE ATTACKED
AND ONE AFTER ANOTHER
WE FELL, LIKE PETALS BEFORE A GALE
WE HAD NO HOPE OF STANDING AGAINST HER
BUT THAT WAS NEVER OUR INTENT WE WERE MERE FODDER
NOTHING MORE THAN A DIVERSION
WAIT
THERE SHOULD BE EIGHT OF YOU
WHERE'S THE OTHER?

YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD HIDE HERE?!
THE OTHERS WERE TO DISTRACT ME WHILE YOU CONCEALED YOURSELF IN THE DEPTHS OF MY PALACE?
THE ONLY THING YOU'VE PUT IN MOTION IS YOUR OWN DEMISE!
I'LL SNUFF OUT THEIR LIVES LATER
...YOURS I'LL TAKE NOW!
UMF!
WHATEVER YOU HOPED THIS PLOY WOULD ACCOMPLISH WILL NEVER COME TO PASS
IT ALREADY HAS

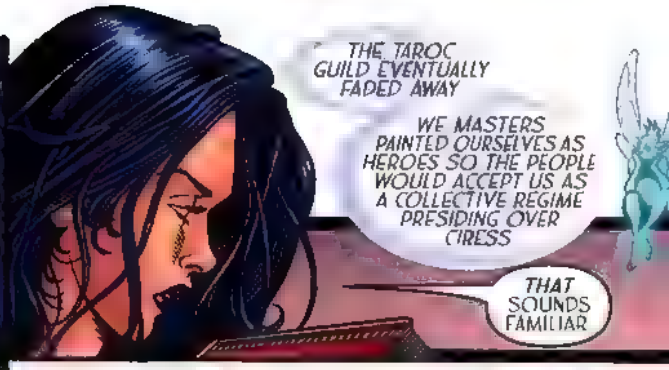
WHAT
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WHAT'S HAPPENING?!
YOU'RE TRAPPED WE BOTH ARE
THE CARDS HAVE FORMED A BARRIER YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO BREAK
NOT NEARLY IN TIME
YOU'RE FOOL ENOUGH TO BELIEVE YOU CAN KEEP ME HERE?
NO.
IT WAS NEVER OUR INTENTION TO KEEP YOU HERE
YOU'LL BE SENT ELSEWHERE...
SOMEPLACE YOU CAN DO NO FURTHER HARM
YOU'RE NOTHING TO ME THE POWER I COMMAND—

THE RITUAL NOT ONLY ENTRAPS YOU
IT OPENS THE WAY FOR US TO USURP YOUR POWER
NO!
I WON'T BE DRAINED AND BANISHED AGAIN!
THE CHOICE IS NOT YOURS
EYAAAGH!

WE SIPHONED ANIMORAS POWER, AND THOUGH WE WERE *THEN* UNAWARE OF IT
THE ENERGIES WE ABSORBED WOULD ALLOW THE SEVEN OF US TO LIVE ON AS *SPIRITS* ONCE OUR NATURAL LIVES ENDED
BUT ETERNAL LIFE IS NOT WITHOUT A PRICE
ANIMORA WAS DRAWN INTO THE NULL VOID, A DIMENSION OF ALL-CONSUMING *NOTHINGNESS*
NO LIGHT
NO SOUND
WE REMAINED SAFE BEHIND OUR BARRIER OF COURSE, REDUCED TO HELPLESSLY WATCHING THE SPECTACLE.
IT WAS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO HEAR ANYTHING OVER THE VORTEX'S HOW
I KNOW I SCREAMED NALIA'S NAME
I LIKE TO THINK SHE SAID *MINE*

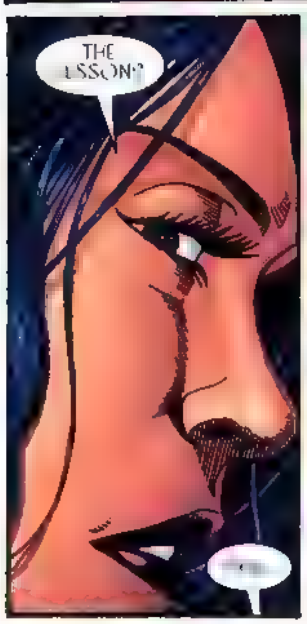
AND THEN SHE WAS GONE
DRESS IS PRESERVED
WE'VE TRIUMPHED!
YES
WE'VE TRIUMPHED
THAT'S SO TRAGIC

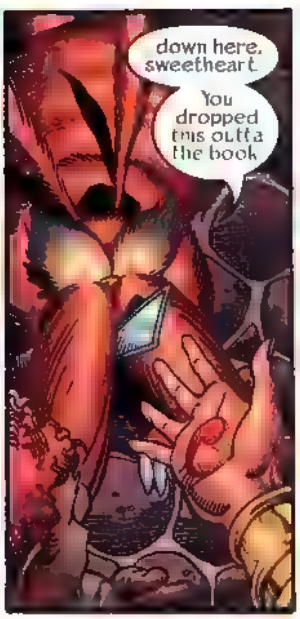
SO HORRIBLY SAD
SHE WAS NEVER RESCUED?
THERE WAS NO WAY TO EVEN ATTEMPT IT
AS FAR AS THE PUBLIC WAS CONCERNED, NALIA WAS A SIMPLE CASUALTY


THE TAROC GUILD EVENTUALLY FADED AWAY
WE MASTERS PAINTED OURSELVES AS HEROES SO THE PEOPLE WOULD ACCEPT US AS A COLLECTIVE REGIME PRESIDING OVER CIRESS
THAT SOUNDS FAMILIAR

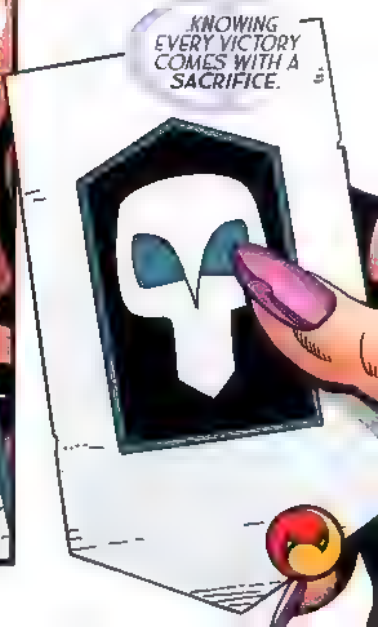
DOESN'T IT.
THERE'S NOT MUCH IN THERE, ELLE, BUT LOOK IF YOU LIKE

ALAIN, THANK YOU FOR TELLING ME IT MUST BE A PAINFUL MEMORY
IT'S NOT A TALE I CARE TO VISIT OFTEN BUT I TELL IT TO YOU IN HOPES YOU'LL LEARN THE LESSON FROM IT
Hmm


THE LESSON?


down here, sweetheart
You dropped this outta the book

WE DO WHAT WE MUST


KNOWING EVERY VICTORY COMES WITH A SACRIFICE.

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CROSSGEN CHRONICLES

CROSSGEN COMICS

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Barbara Kesel
Esteban Maroto
Nick Bell

CROSSGEN CHRONICLES presents a tale of THE FIRST

The CrossGen Universe exploded when the Sigil-Bearers were graced with their marks of power – but the worlds of CrossGen existed long before. **Chronicles** tells tales of pasts both distant and recent, detailing rich histories and hinting at mysterious futures...

They were the gods who created the universe...

In the beginning was Altwaal, first of the First, Bearer of the Seven Weapons, Leader of all. Then came the six: **Pyrem, Ingra, Orium, Trenin, Gannish,** and **Yala,** followed by many more First who appeared during the Age of Creation. When that era was done, the population continued to grow as the first-created spawned a second generation: the natural-born Secundae, product of two First; and the half-bloods, product of a First and one of the inhabitants of the many worlds below. Beings from other dimensions and inhuman races came as slaves or guests until Elysia, the city of the First, was a city of millions.

And they fought. Seemingly created for war, the First met on the fields beyond Elysia. Simple battles became sophisticated warfare as they strove to gain power or control through their endless fighting. It was constant, brutal, and costly. It had to end.

To resolve the conflict, Altwaal built a tower in the middle of Elysia from which he ruled. Although Altwaal was clever and fair in his judgments, there were those who resented his position as first among First. An insurrection was born, based on Gannish's ideas about democratic rule, directed by Orium's partial visions of the future, and fueled by a pregnant Ingra's ambition. An assassination was attempted, but foiled when the wrong subject was killed. Altwaal's response was to tear the city apart, isolating the First into two like-minded groups, House Dexter of the selfless and House Sinister of the selfish.

Peace and boredom followed. Now, centuries later, the First have been catalyzed into action with the appearance of the Sigil-Bearers, beings of great power that was not given to them by the First. But this day – and the two who would rise to lead them through this crisis – were foreseen long ago...

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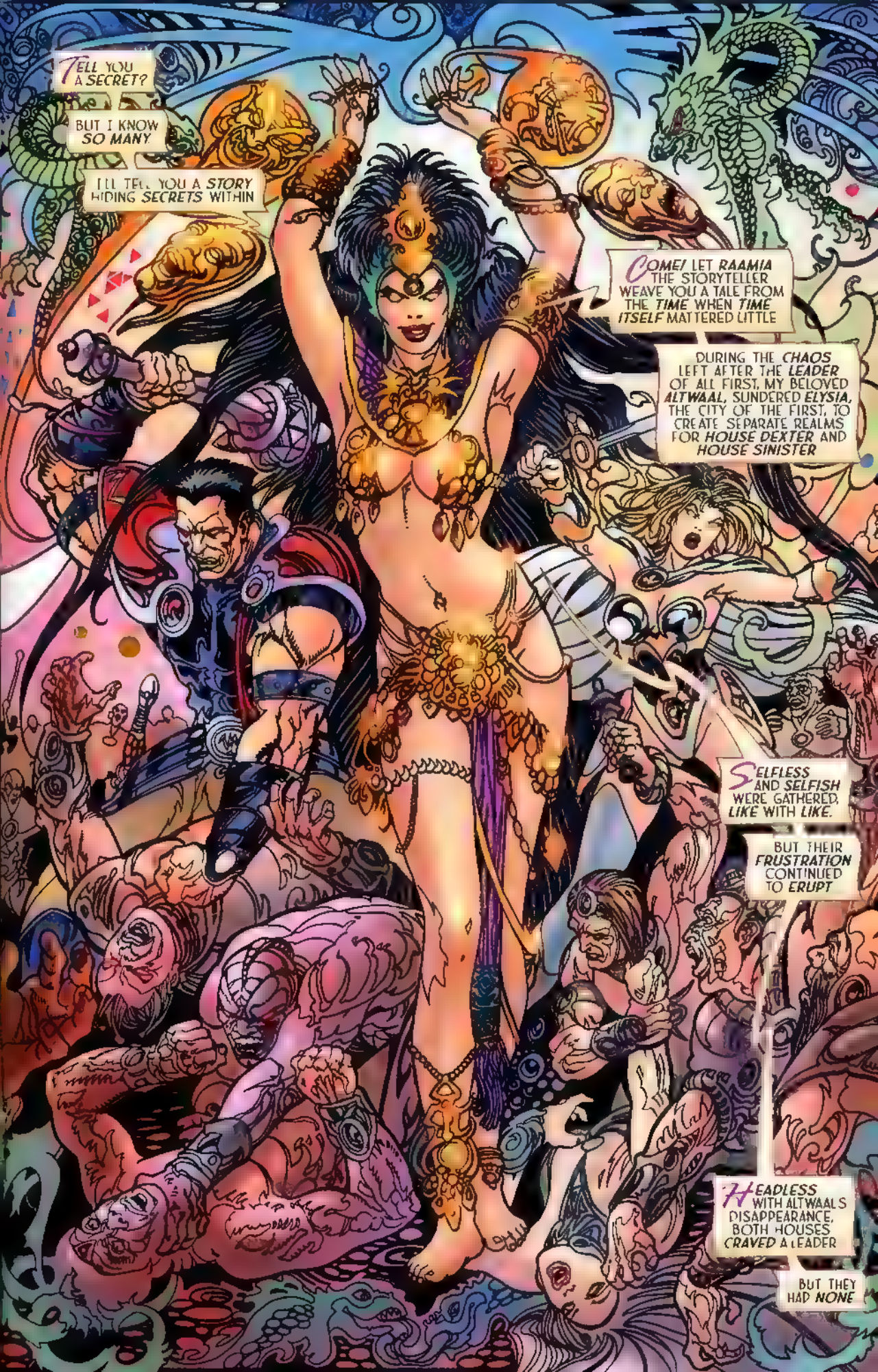

TELL YOU A SECRET?
BUT I KNOW SO MANY
I'LL TELL YOU A STORY HIDING SECRETS WITHIN
COME! LET RAAMIA THE STORYTELLER WEAVE YOU A TALE FROM THE TIME WHEN TIME ITSELF MATTERED LITTLE
DURING THE CHAOS LEFT AFTER THE LEADER OF ALL FIRST, MY BELOVED ALTWAAL, SUNDERED ELYSIA, THE CITY OF THE FIRST, TO CREATE SEPARATE REALMS FOR HOUSE DEXTER AND HOUSE SINISTER
SELFLESS AND SELFISH WERE GATHERED, LIKE WITH LIKE.
BUT THEIR FRUSTRATION CONTINUED TO ERUPT
HEADLESS WITH ALTWAAL'S DISAPPEARANCE, BOTH HOUSES CRAVED A LEADER
BUT THEY HAD NONE

YALA OF DEXTER, CAUGHT BETWEEN HER LUST FOR SWORDPLAY AND HER JOYOUS NATURE, WASN'T NATURALLY INCLINED TO END THE MELEE
WITH ALTWAAL GONE, SHE CRIED FOR DEXTER'S GENERAL OF ARMIES.
PYREM!
WHERE ARE YOU?
YALA'S CALL WENT UNANSWERED, BUT NOT UNNOTICED.
FOR THE KINDEST OF EYES HELD VIGIL OVER THE DISAPPOINTING SCENE
AS ONE WHO HAD DONE SO MUCH AND DESERVED HIS REST WAS CALLED ON TO DO STILL MORE!

PYREM, TORN FROM WITHIN BY THE TWIN YEARNINGS OF DIVIDED LOYALTIES, HAD RETREATED INTO A PRIVATE SPACE BETWEEN SUNBEAMS TO BROOD
BUT THERE IS ONE WHO IS NOT SO EASILY AVOIDED!
PYREM!
WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED YOUR HOUSE?

ALTWAAL!
WHAT HOLDS YOU HERE, FAR FROM RESPONSIBILITY, WHEN DUTY CALLS YOU TO TAKE COMMAND?
WONDERING WHY *YOU* WERE SO CERTAIN I SHOULD BE YOUR SUCCESSOR!
I'M NO LONGER CERTAIN OF MYSELF, TOO PRONE TO HESITATION I CANNOT *POSSIBLY* BE THE LEADER THEY NEED!
ALTWAAL, PLEASE—I'M NOT WORTHY TO TAKE UP YOUR ROLE
I FEAR YOU CHOSE THE WRONG MAN
I CHOSE *RIGHT*, PYREM, AND I CHOSE *WELL!*
IT WILL TAKE THE *MOST FEELING* OF THE FIRST TO GUIDE THE HOUSE OF THE SELFLESS!
BUT IF YOU WALLOW HERE IN YOUR DOUBT FOR TOO LONG, THERE WILL BE NO HOUSE DEXTER *TO* LEAD!
WITHOUT *YOU* TO QUELL THE PANIC, DEXTER IS DRIVEN TO BATTLE ITSELF!
YOUR EMPATHY IS THE KEY TO ENDING THIS CIVIL WAR!
LOOK!

CYREM, YOUR TIE TO SINISTER HAS ITS PURPOSE IN WHAT LIES AHEAD!
YOU WILL FACE TWO CHALLENGES ONE WITHOUT AND ONE WITHIN
TO THAT END I HAVE COME TO GIVE YOU ONE PIECE OF THE BLESSING BESTOWED ON ME. THE ELEMENTAL FORCES OF LIFE ITSELF
THERE ARE FOUR PARTS TO TWO HORSES. TWO TO LIVES OLD, TWO TO NEW. THEY WILL BE THE KEYS TO OUR SURVIVAL
AS THE CULMINATION OF ALL THAT BEGAN WHEN I WROE NAMED RAAMIAS KETER COMES TO PASS!
YOU SEE? THE AIR ITS SUN IT WARMTH MAGNIFIES YOUR CALM GIVING YOU ROOM FOR THOUGHT
AND THE STRENGTH TO RESIST BEING WASHED AWAY
...
...

THEY ARE THE LAST OF THE SEVEN TO BE USED BY TWO OR MORE
BE BRAVE, PYRRM, A BETTER TIME AWAITS US...
BUT THE PRICE WILL BE HIGH.
ALTWAAL, I'D SUSPECT YOUR VISIT WAS ONLY THE ILLUSION OF MY TROUBLED MIND, BUT YOUR WEAPONS ARE EVIDENCE ENOUGH.
EVEN THOUGH YOUR WORDS INSPIRE MORE CAUTION THAN CONFIDENCE

INGRA, SHOULD YOU BE OUT HERE IN THIS MESS -- AREN'T YOU COMING CLOSE TO YOUR TIME?
BITE YOUR TONGUE, BRAAG! YOU'LL NEVER SEE THE DAY WHEN I HIDE MYSELF FROM TROUBLE BEFORE I MUST!
JUST AS HOUSE DEXTER'S PASSIONS RAN WILD, SO TOO HAD HOUSE SINISTER LOST ITS WITS TO WAR
ONE IN THEIR MIDST FELT THE PAIN DOUBLY, FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT, FOR INGRA WAS WITH CHILD
SHE ALLOWED THE ASSUMPTION THAT IT WAS BRAAG'S TO LINGER, BUT INGRA'S PASSION FOR PYREM WAS LEGENDARY
TIME WOULD TELL, EVEN IF INGRA WOULDN'T
UNGH! NOT NOW!
INGRA? YOUR CHILD - IT'S COMING?
ORIUM!
OH, WHERE'S THAT VISION SOAKED FOOL TAKEN HIMSELF?
YOU WANT ORIUM TO ASSIST IN YOUR DELIVERY?
NO, OF COURSE NOT!
I WANT HIM TO CONTROL THIS CHAOS SO I CAN TAKE MYSELF AWAY TO DELIVER!
ORIUM!
BUT CAN'T I --

ORIUM WAS A VISIONARY UPSTART WHO HAD LED THE INSURRECTION THAT ENDED WITH ALTWAAL'S CREATION OF THE EIDOLON RIFT
ALTWAAL REWARDED THE PROPHET WITH THE GIFT OF TRUE FORESIGHT...
INGRA!
BUT THE KNOWLEDGE BORNE EASILY BY ALTWAAL WAS TOO MUCH FOR ONE WHO WAS NOT FIRST AMONG FIRST TO BEAR!
ORIUM THE REBEL BECAME ORIUM THE MAD
WHO RUFFLES THE ROILING WATERS OF MY SIGHT?
WHO...?
WHA...?
YOU!!

ORIUM, WHY ARE YOU SOAKING IN YOUR MISERY INSTEAD OF GUIDING YOUR HOUSE OUT OF CHAOS?
ALTWAAL?
ALTWAAL
OH, PLEASE, GREAT LEADER, TAKE IT AWAY!
THE SIGHT
PLEASE
I BEG YOU
THE SIGHT WAS THE PRICE OF YOUR CRIME AND IS YOUR DUTY TO BEAR, ORIUM, BUT I CAN GRANT YOU A SMALL INDULGENCE
A GIFT TO THE ONE WHO IS ONE WITH ALL WATER, A SPHERE TO ACT AS FOCUS FOR YOUR VISION
LOOK WI...IN!

YOU, SEER, ARE BURDENED WITH KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT PROOF -- VISIONS LACKING WORDS TO CONTAIN THEM
ONLY MADNESS CAN EMBRACE SUCH KNOWLEDGE
SO YOU ARE DOOMED TO MADNESS UNTIL AND UNLESS THE NEW LEADER REUNITES ELYSIA
UNLESS ?
HE
SHE
WHO?
WHICH ONE!
WHICH ONE?
NOOOOO!
ALTWAAL, DON'T GO!
THE TAINTED SLUDGE OF TRUTH IS TOO CORRUPT-- WASH IT AWAY!
ALTWAAL!
WASH IT AWAY!
I KNOW WHICH ONE --
I CANNOT KNOW!
BOTH!
PROTECT BOTH!

ALTWAAL'S EYES!
LEAVE ME BE, WOMAN!
DON'T CRY, NEW MOTHER -- THERE'S NO NEED FOR YOU TO SUFFER SO!
THE BREW AND MY SPELLS WILL BANISH THE PAIN -
-- I'LL TAKE IT ALL AWAY
NOOOO!
THIS PAIN, LIKE THIS CHILD, IS MINE

YOU WILL NOT TAKE IT AWAY!
NO ONE'S GOING TO RUN OFF WITH YOUR CHILD, LADY INGRA
MY ONLY WISH IS TO STEAL AWAY YOUR PAIN!
I SAID NO.
IT'S MINE
MOTHER
MINE
ALTHOUGH INGRA DENIED THE FATHER

...THE CHILD THEY HAD MADE UNITED THEM, LINKING PYREM TO THE PAIN OF HER BIRTH!
FATHER
EEYNGH!
ALTWAAL? IS THIS PAIN THE PRICE OF YOUR GIFT?
I ACCEPT!
IF HOUSE DEXTER NEEDS ME TO LEAD IT
OR A SPUR TO ACTION?
IN EITHER CASE
SO BE IT!

SHOW ME SOME RESISTANCE, ARKREG!
DIDN'T I TRAIN YOU BETTER THAN THAT?
PYREM!
COME TO HELP, I HOPE?
MORE THAN THAT, YALA. I'VE COME TO TAKE MY PLACE AS LEADER
HA! PYREM, I'LL HAPPILY FIGHT BY YOUR SIDE, BUT YOU SHOULDN'T PRESUME TO--
BY HIS EYES!
YOU
YOU HAVE ALTWAAL'S WEAPONS
AND HIS BLESSING
THEN YOU HAVE MY BLADE, PYREM

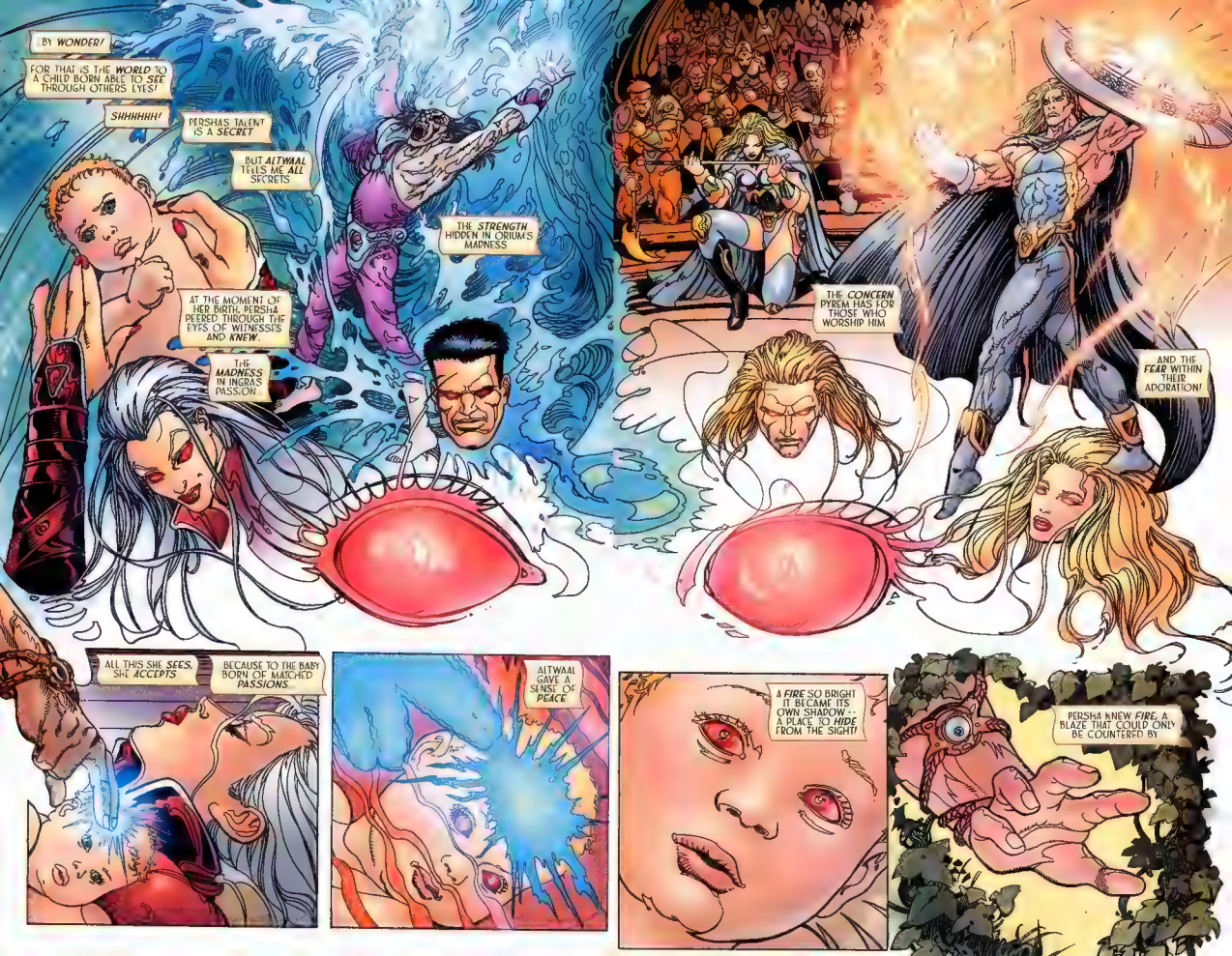
SO DID PYREM RETURN TO HOUSE DEXTER BEARING WITHIN HIM THEIR MISSING PEACE
THOSE OF HIS HOUSE WERE STRUCK BY WONDER, REALIZING THAT PYREM HAD RETURNED AS SOMETHING MORE THAN BEFORE

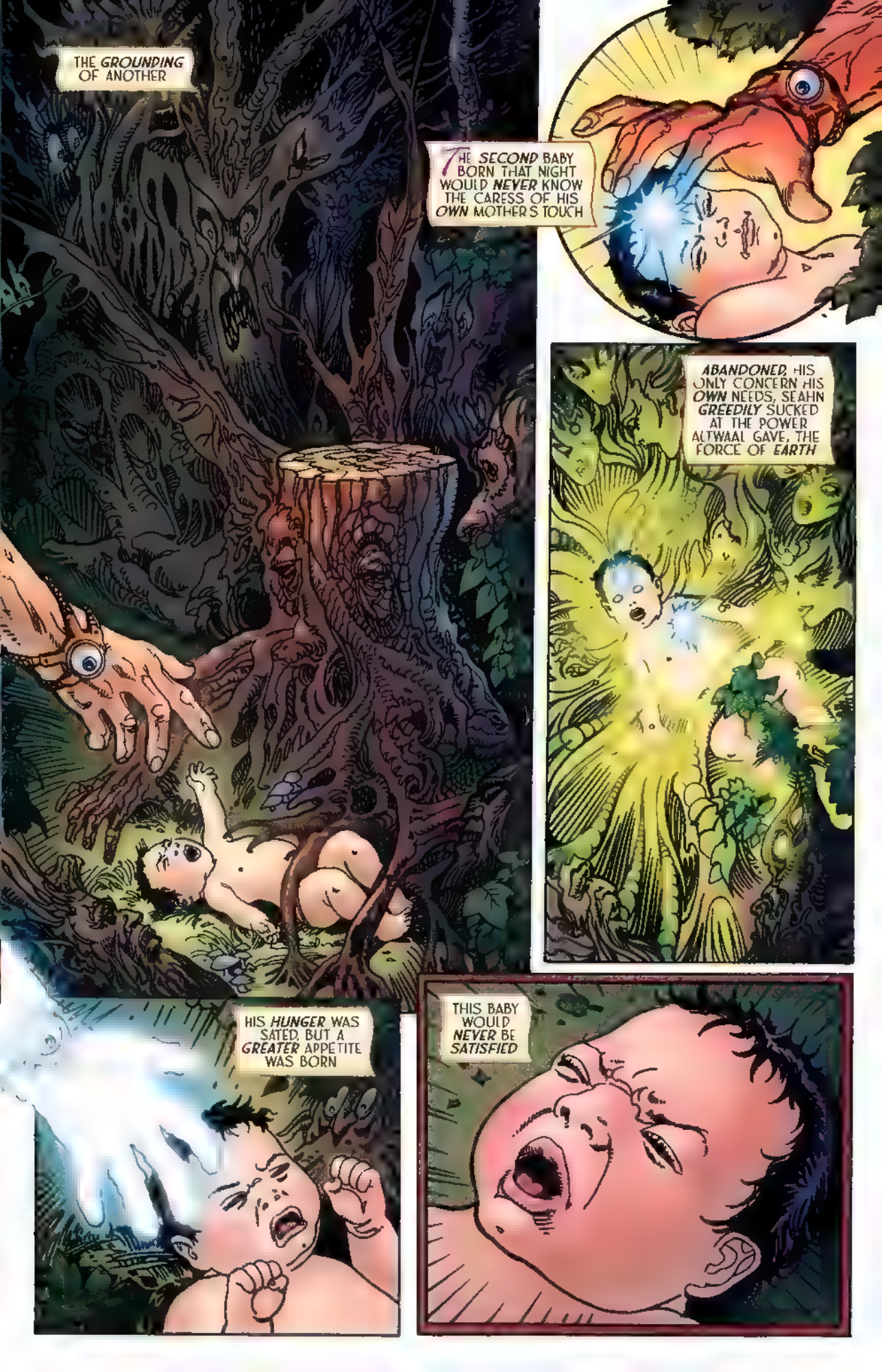
AS THEY PLEDGED THEMSELVES TO HIM, SO DID PYREM PLEDGE HIS LOYALTY SOLELY TO HIS HOUSE...
...TO THEM.
PUTTING ASIDE THAT DAY ALL THOUGHTS OF LOVE OR ANY OTHER ALLEGIANCES..
...HE BECAME THE LEADER HE HAD FEARED HE COULD NOT BECOME.

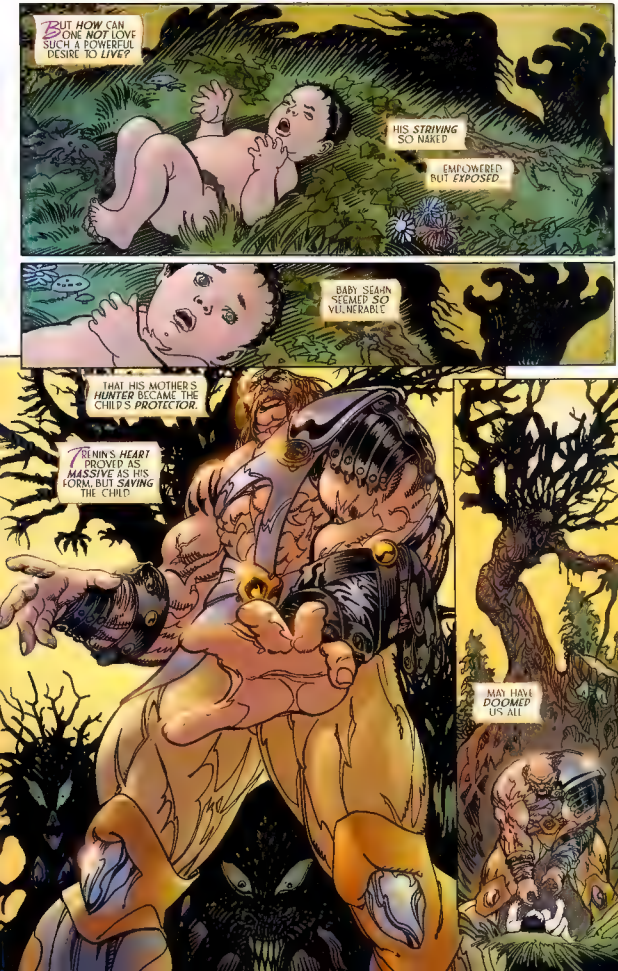
HOUSE SINISTER, AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, WAS FAR TOO FOND OF ITS VICIOUS REVELS TO GIVE UP THE FUN SO EASILY
THAT WOULD HAVE MEANT BEING RESPONSIBLE
NOT THEIR SPECIALITY
BUT LO AND BEHOLD, WHO SHOULD ARRIVE TO SAVE THEM BUT ORIUM!
ALTHOUGH HE'D MADE A SPLENDID INCITER OF REBELS, HE SEEMED AN UNLIKELY LEADER FOR HOUSE SINISTER
GROGGY, YET FORTIFIED WITH THE RISING TIDE OF HIS GIFT
THE MADMAN CALLED FORTH FORCES MORE POWERFUL THAN THE FIGHTING

ORIUM CONQUERED THEM WITH EASE, FLOODING THEM WITH THE DAREST OF GLIMPSES OF THE MADNESS HE HOLDS BLEARILY IN CHECK
OVERWHELMED BY THE ENORMITY OF THE FRACTION HE EXPOSED TO THEM, HOUSE SINISTER ACKNOWLEDGED, IN THAT MOMENT, THEIR NEW LEADER

AS FOR ALTWAAL, HIS SWEET TOUCH WENT UNNOTICED DURING THE DUELING MELEES--- HE MOVED INVISIBLY AMONG US.
LEAVING BEHIND A SIGN OF HIS PASSAGE
AND A REMINDER OF HIS RULE
HED TOUCHED US ALL, LEAVING MYSTERIES, PROPHECIES, RIDDLES AND SIGHT
HIS TOUCH HAD RETURNED ME FROM DEATH, BUT THAT WAS BEFORE
NOW ANOTHER NEW LIFE
WOULD BE TOUCHED


BY WONDER!
FOR THAT IS THE WORLD TO A CHILD BORN ABLE TO SEE THROUGH OTHERS EYES!
SHHHHHH!
PERSHA'S TALENT IS A SECRET
BUT ALTWAAL TELLS ME ALL SECRETS
THE STRENGTH HIDDEN IN ORIUM'S MADNESS
AT THE MOMENT OF HER BIRTH, PERSHA PEERED THROUGH THE EYES OF WITNESSES AND KNEW.
THE MADNESS IN INGRA'S PASSION
THE CONCERN PYREM HAS FOR THOSE WHO WORSHIP HIM
AND THE FEAR WITHIN THEIR ADORATION!
ALL THIS SHE SEES. SHE ACCEPTS
BECAUSE TO THE BABY BORN OF MATCHED PASSIONS...
ALTWAAL GAVE A SENSE OF PEACE
A FIRE SO BRIGHT IT BECAME ITS OWN SHADOW -- A PLACE TO HIDE FROM THE SIGHT!
PERSHA KNEW FIRE, A BLAZE THAT COULD ONLY BE COUNTERED BY


THE GROUNDING OF ANOTHER
THE SECOND BABY BORN THAT NIGHT WOULD NEVER KNOW THE CARESS OF HIS OWN MOTHER'S TOUCH
ABANDONED, HIS ONLY CONCERN HIS OWN NEEDS, SEAHN GREEDILY SUCKED AT THE POWER ALTWAAL GAVE, THE FORCE OF EARTH
HIS HUNGER WAS SATED, BUT A GREATER APPETITE WAS BORN
THIS BABY WOULD NEVER BE SATISFIED


BUT HOW CAN ONE NOT LOVE SUCH A POWERFUL DESIRE TO LIVE?
HIS STRIVING SO NAKED
EMPOWERED BUT EXPOSED
BABY SEAHN SEEMED SO VULNERABLE
THAT HIS MOTHER'S HUNTER BECAME THE CHILD'S PROTECTOR.
TRENIN'S HEART PROVED AS MASSIVE AS HIS FORM, BUT SAVING THE CHILD
MAY HAVE DOOMED US ALL

TO THE FATE OF THESE TWO BABES IS TIED THE FATE OF THE FIRST
IT'S AN ANCIENT QUESTION NATURE, OR NURTURE?
WHICH IS STRONGER?
WILL SIGHT'S CLARITY BE CLOUDED BY PASSION?
WILL HUNGER'S CRUELTY BE BALANCED BY KINDNESS?
WHICH WAY WILL PROVE STRONGER?
ONE WAY UNITES US, ONE WAY ENDS US
IT MAY BE THAT I KNOW HOW THIS STORY WILL END.
BUT THERE'S NO TELLING

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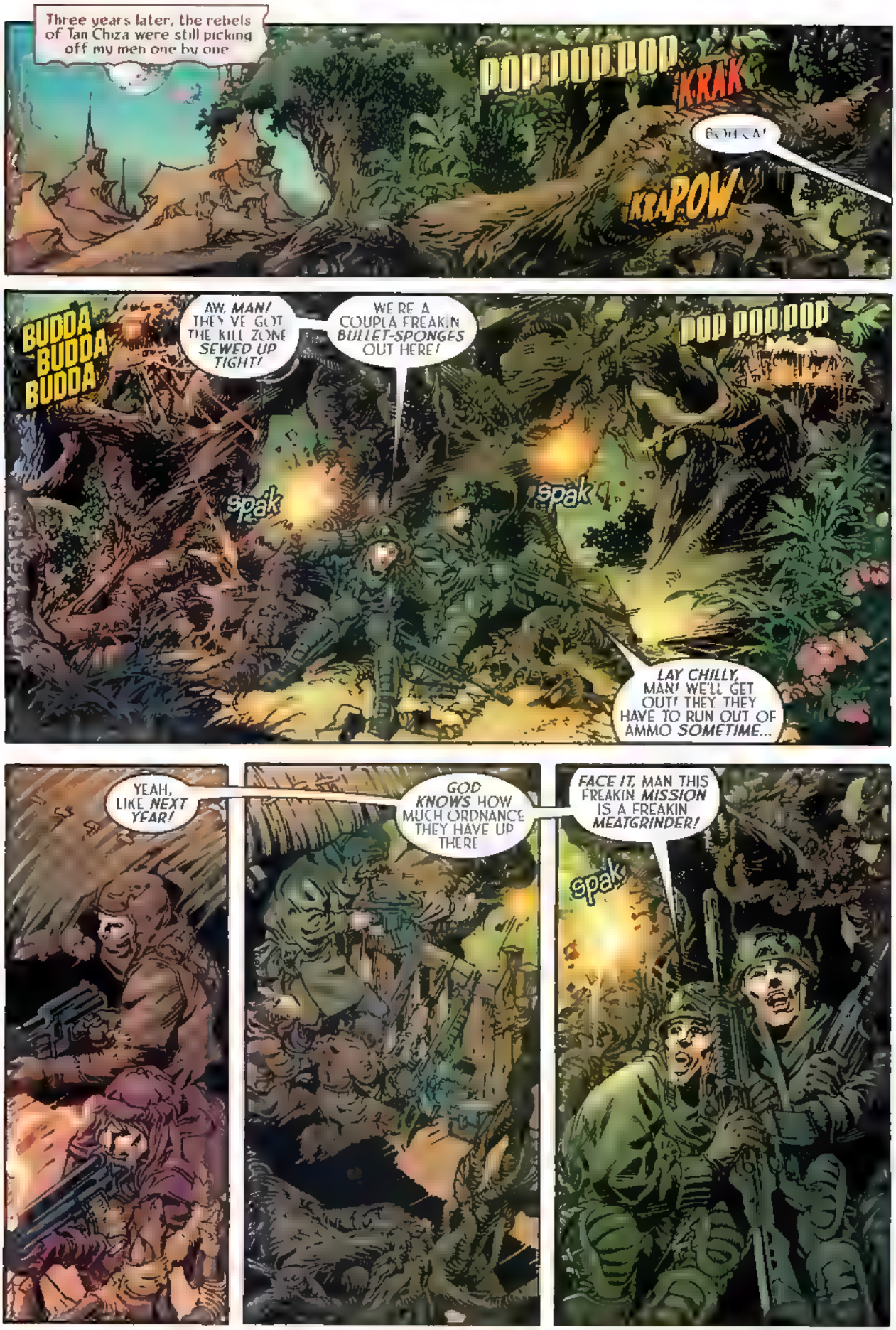
Dear Whoever Gets This,
My name is Obregon Kaine. If you're from Kazrath, you probably think you know all about me.
Depending on which news sites you read, I'm either a champion of the oppressed or a cold-blooded killer. Or both.
But there has never been an accurate account of my story until now -- and you're holding it.
I just wanted the truth written down, so that if I don't make it back home, maybe one of my companions can deliver it for me.
Don't get me wrong. I'm not looking to salvage my reputation. If you don't like me, I couldn't care less.
But if you think I'm some kind of hero, then I've got to set you straight. I need you people to wake up and realize that I'm just as messed up as anyone.
24th
PALADINS
A.A.C

YOU'RE HERE TO FIGHT, LADIES! THIS IS THE ARMY--YOU GET PAID TO KILL!
QUIT HOLDING BACK, KAINE! HELL, YOU AIN'T EVEN BROKE A SWEAT!
I was the youngest of seven brothers, so fighting came to me as naturally as breathing. When I got out of school, there wasn't much doubt where I'd find my career.
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? DESTROY YOUR ENEMY!
SLOPPY BLOCK, CROGHAN! YOU'D BE DEAD!

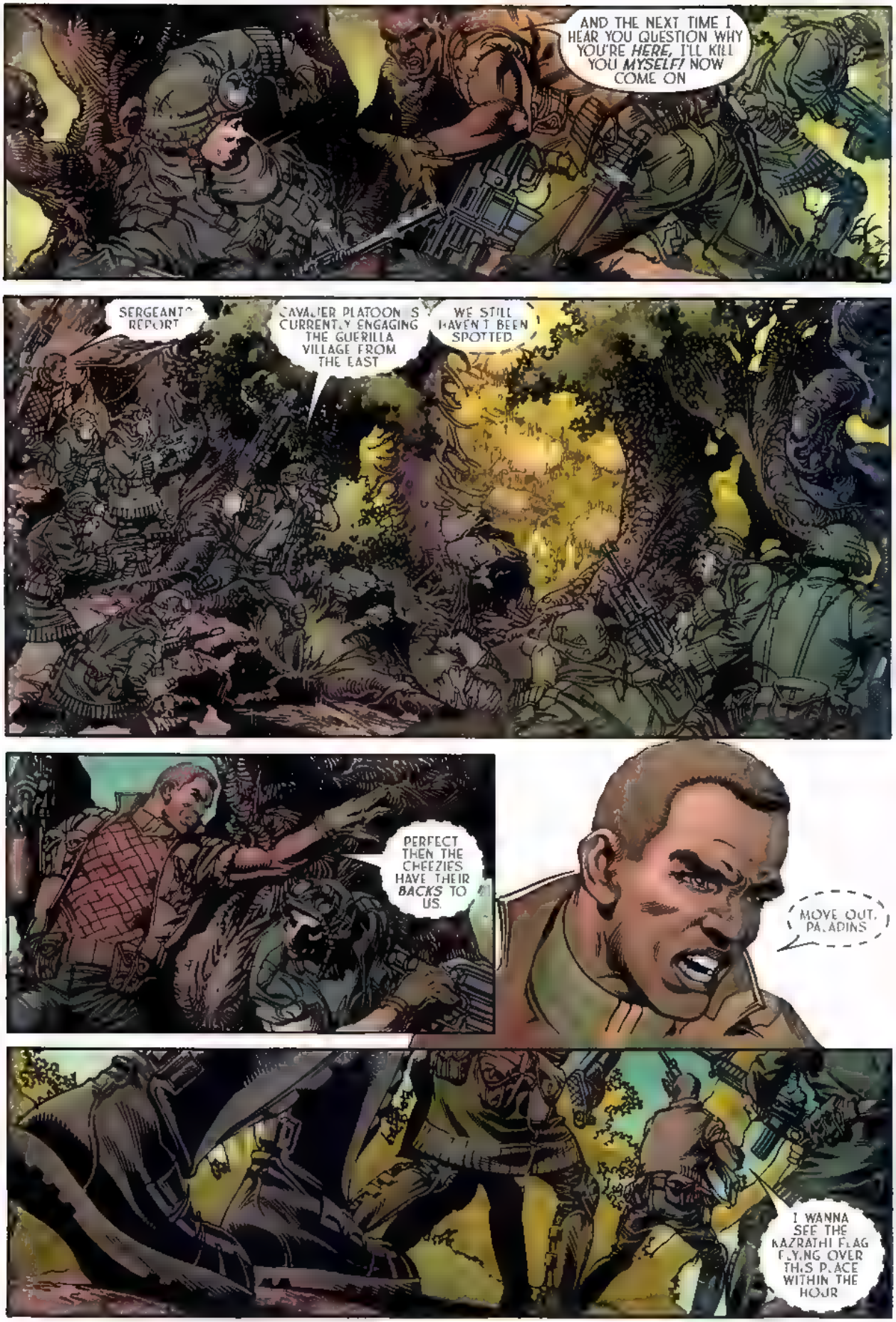
In all of boot camp, there was only one recruit who could go toe to toe with me-- Private Gral Radim.
LET'S GO, FLAT-TOP
KAINE! RADIM! WHICH OF YOU LADIES WANTS TO BE PUGEL STICK CHAMP?
Pound for pound, move for move, we were evenly matched
Naturally, we'd hated each other from week one.
YAHH!
=UNGH=
=OOF=
=GUH=

KLANK
The pugel stick championships was a long-awaited chance to finally settle who the best man was
>HUFF<
>HUFF<
WELL, KISS MY KHAKI BUTT! FINALLY A CHALLENGE FOR KILLER KAINE!
I HAVEN'T SEEN SO MUCH SWEATIN AND GROANIN SINCE YOUR MOMMAS PAID ME A VISIT LAST NIGHT!
NOW QUIT MAKIN' EYES AT EACH OTHER AND FINISH IT!
Gunny Blanchard didn't get it. The physical fight was a stalemate. The true battle was fought in a different arena
The moment our eyes locked, it became a contest of wills -- each of us waiting for the other to falter, each surprised by the courage and ferocity in the others gaze.
And maybe it was at that very moment, staring into my soul, that Grai Radim realized who the best man had to be.

KLANK
CONGRATULATIONS, SHREE JUST DON'T ASK ME ABOUT GRAL'S BACHELOR PARTY
HAR DE-HAR
SERIOUSLY SHREE YOU GOT A GOOD ONE HERE
DON'T YOU THINK I KNOW THAT OBIE?
By finishing at the top of our class, we'd both made the cut for elite training at the Frontline Guard Academy.
Two hellish months later we could count ourselves among the best of the best in the Republican Army.
HEADS UP! THE C-IN-C'S MAKING IT OFFICIAL!
AND SINCE TAKING ON THIS JOB I HAVE WANTED TO RECLAIM THE COLONIES WE LOST TO SEPARATIST REBELS ALMOST TWENTY YEARS AGO.
TODAY, I SIGNED THE ORDER COMMITTING OUR ARMED FORCES TO THIS GLORIOUS CAMPAIGN OF REUNIFICATION.
THE RENEGADE WORLDS OF BALAN, CORREMINA, AND TAN CHIZA WILL REJOIN THE KAZRATHI REPUBLIC BEFORE THE YEAR IS OVER!


Three years later, the rebels of Tan Chiza were still picking off my men one by one
POP POP POP
KRAK
KRAPOW
BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
AW, MAN! THEY'VE GOT THE KILL ZONE SEWED UP TIGHT!
WE'RE A COUPLA FREAKIN BULLET-SPONGES OUT HERE!
POP POP POP
spak
spak
LAY CHILLY, MAN! WE'LL GET OUT! THEY THEY HAVE TO RUN OUT OF AMMO SOMETIME...
YEAH, LIKE NEXT YEAR!
GOD KNOWS HOW MUCH ORDNANCE THEY HAVE UP THERE
FACE IT, MAN THIS FREAKIN MISSION IS A FREAKIN MEATGRINDER!
spak

THIS WHOLE WAR IS A MEATGRINDER!
YOU REALLY THINK WE CAN BEAT THE CHEEZIES?
YOU THINK THEY'RE EVER GIVIN UP? THEY'RE FIGHTIN' FOR THEIR HOMES, MAN!
WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?
WHAT DO YOU EVER FIGHT FOR, PRIVATE?
BUDDA BUDDA
YOU FIGHT FOR YOUR BUDDIES! FOR THE GUY BESIDE YOU WHO'S COUNTING ON YOU TO HAVE SOME BACKBONE!
NEXT TIME YOU'RE STUPID ENOUGH TO GET CUT OFF FROM THE PLATOON, I'LL LET THE CHEEZIES KILL YOU!


AND THE NEXT TIME I HEAR YOU QUESTION WHY YOU'RE *HERE*, I'LL KILL YOU *MYSELF!* NOW COME ON
SERGEANT? REPORT
CAVALIER PLATOON IS CURRENTLY ENGAGING THE GUERILLA VILLAGE FROM THE EAST
WE STILL HAVEN'T BEEN SPOTTED
PERFECT. THEN THE CHEEZIES HAVE THEIR *BACKS* TO US.
MOVE OUT, PALADINS
I WANNA SEE THE KAZRATHI FLAG FLYING OVER THIS PLACE WITHIN THE HOUR

SO IS *EVERY* FRONTLINER AS *FEARLESS* AS LIEUTENANT KAINE? OR DO THEY JUST *CUT OUT* THAT PART OF YOUR BRAIN AT THE ACADEMY?

IT'S *PERSONAL*. 'BOUT A YEAR AGO, TAN CHIZAN GUERILLAS CAUGHT AND *TORTURED* AN E.G. SERGEANT NAMED GRAL. RADIM *PARALYZED* HIM FOR LIFE.
RADIM AND KAINE WERE PALS. THEY EVEN MADE IT THROUGH THE BLACKGLADE P.O.W. CAMP TOGETHER.

HE SURVIVED *BLACKGLADE*?

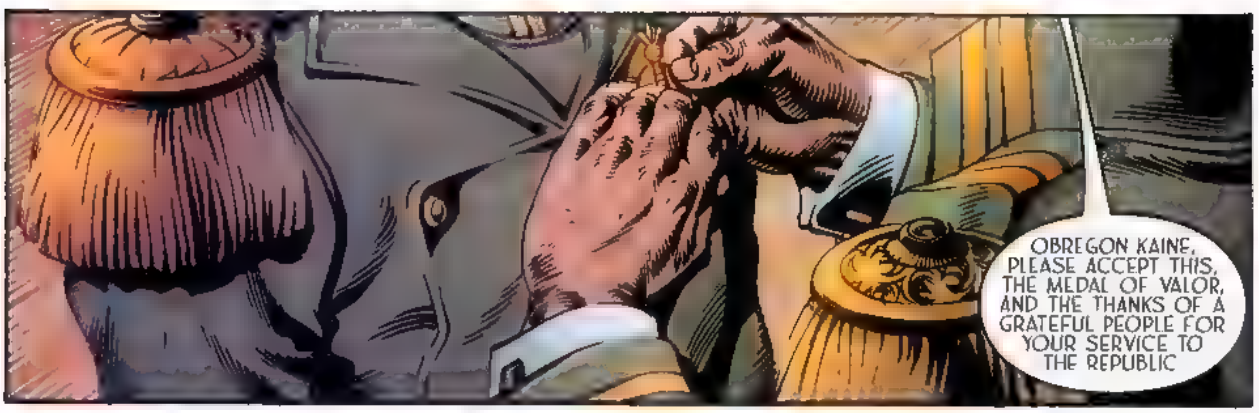
The fact that our enemies were so often women and children had long since stopped bothering me

Gral told me that his interrogator was a woman. The things she did to him. .
Nobody was innocent anymore

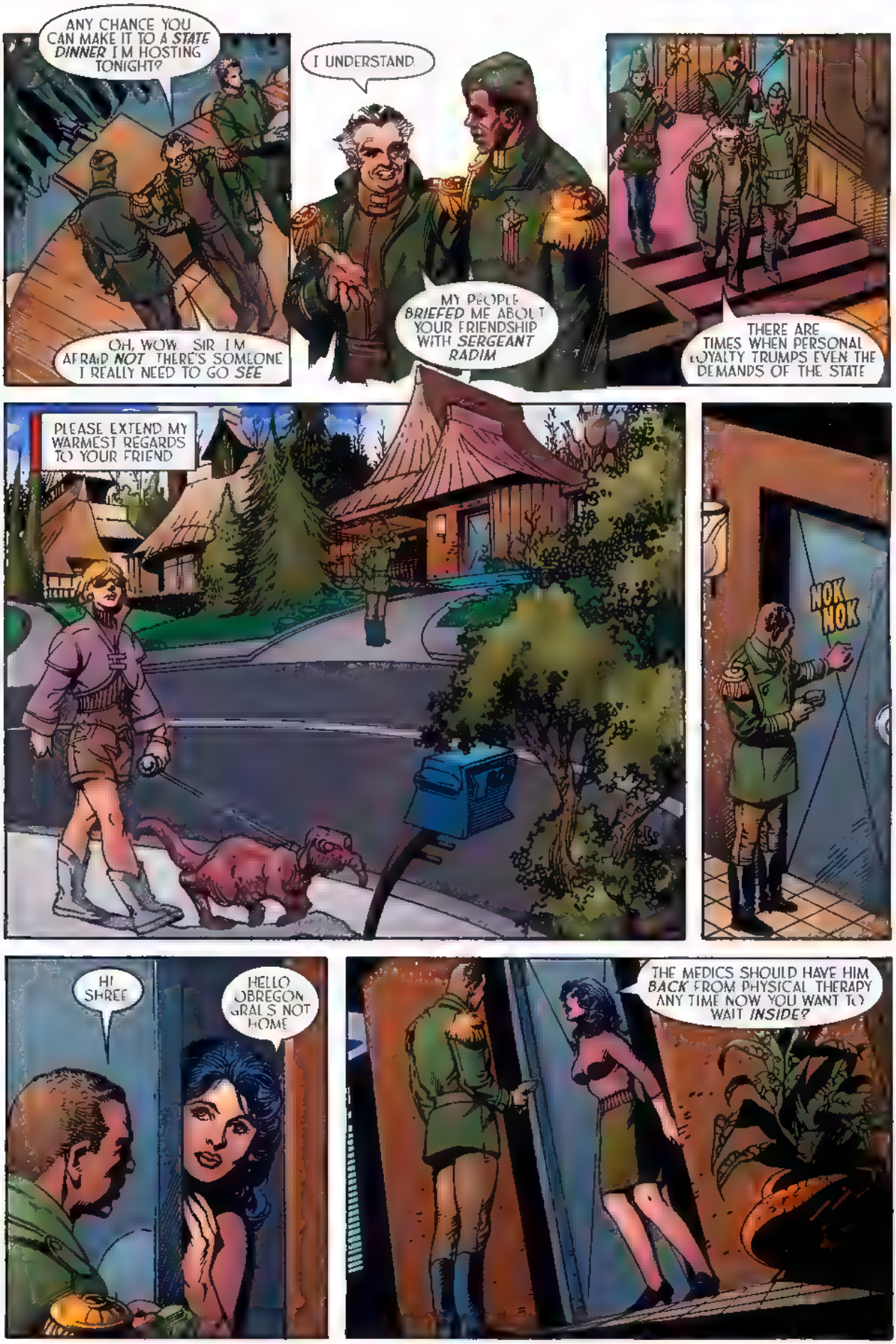
And so we took the village
...and the next one after that.
and the one after that
and it felt good.
Each victory was payback
Each kill was a piece of my best friend's honor reclaimed
Vengeance was mine

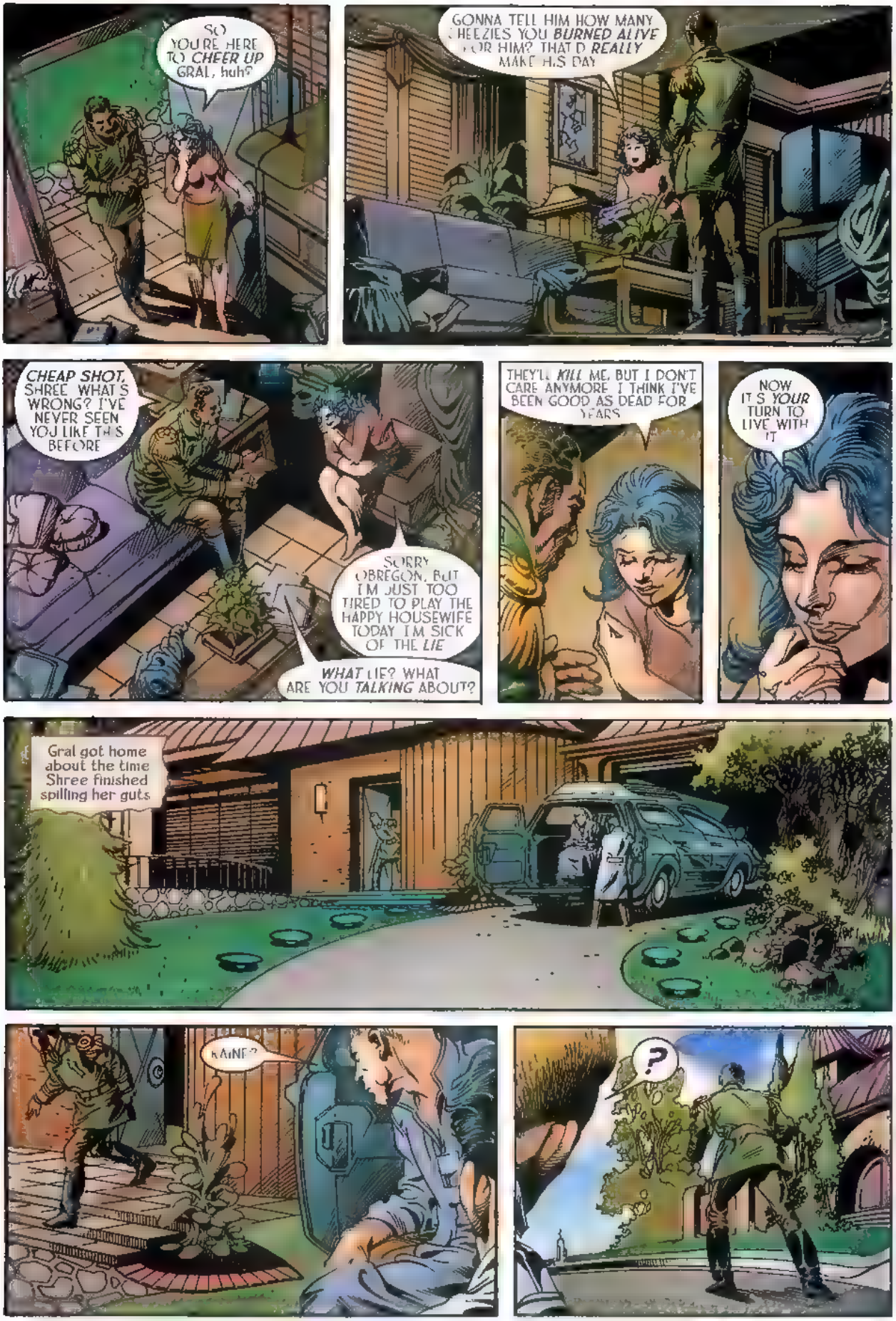
ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE COLONY OF TAN CHIZA IS NOW OFFICIALLY LIBERATED FROM THE REBEL FORCES CONTROLLING IT
WHILE THIS IS THE RESULT OF PRESIDENT SUBAHDAR'S COMMITMENT TO REUNITE THE WORLDS OF THE KAZRATH SYSTEM
THE PRESIDENT REMINDS US THAT THE VICTORY WAS WON THROUGH THE COURAGE OF INDIVIDUAL SOLDIERS

MEN LIKE LIEUTENANT OBREGON KAINE OF THE ARMORED AIR CAVALRY'S PALADIN PLATOON
IT WAS KAINE HIMSELF WHO TOOK REBEL LEADER KARIK TOBOLD INTO CUSTODY, MARKING THE END OF THE TAN CHIZAN INSURRECTION

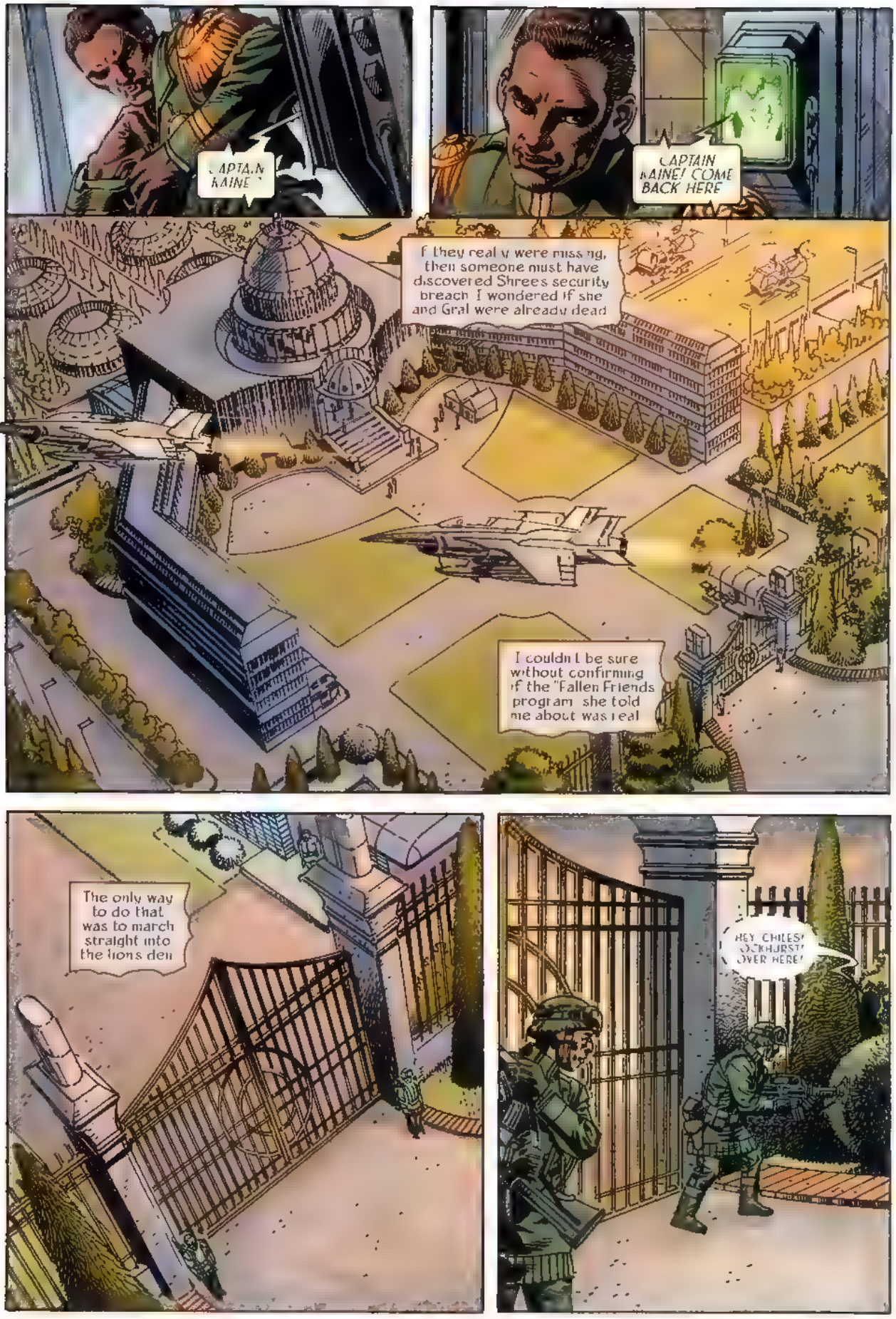

OBREGON KAINE, PLEASE ACCEPT THIS, THE MEDAL OF VALOR, AND THE THANKS OF A GRATEFUL PEOPLE FOR YOUR SERVICE TO THE REPUBLIC

EFFECTIVE TODAY, I AM PROMOTING YOU TO THE RANK OF *CAPTAIN* IN THE FRONTLINE GUARD
THANK YOU, SIR
I was just a kid when the civil war ripped Kazrath to shreds, but I remember the bad times.
With no end in sight for the war on the homeworld, the colonies figured they didn't need us anymore. And we were too busy killing each other to do anything about it.
MY FELLOW KAZRATHIS, IT IS MEN LIKE *THIS* THAT MAKE THE REPUBLIC *GREAT!*
General Arno Subahdar ended that chaos and restored a sense of community between even the bitterest rivals.
Having him pat my back was worth more to me than the medal he'd pinned to my chest


ANY CHANCE YOU CAN MAKE IT TO A *STATE DINNER* I'M HOSTING TONIGHT?
OH, WOW. SIR I'M AFRAID *NOT*. THERE'S SOMEONE I REALLY NEED TO GO *SEE*
I UNDERSTAND.
MY PEOPLE *BRIEFED* ME ABOUT YOUR FRIENDSHIP WITH *SERGEANT RADIM*
THERE ARE TIMES WHEN PERSONAL LOYALTY TRUMPS EVEN THE DEMANDS OF THE STATE
PLEASE EXTEND MY WARMEST REGARDS TO YOUR FRIEND
NOK NOK
HI SHREE
HELLO OBREGON GRAL'S NOT HOME
THE MEDICS SHOULD HAVE HIM *BACK* FROM PHYSICAL THERAPY ANY TIME NOW. YOU WANT TO WAIT *INSIDE*?


SO YOU'RE HERE TO CHEER UP GRAL, huh?
GONNA TELL HIM HOW MANY CHEEZIES YOU BURNED ALIVE FOR HIM? THAT'D REALLY MAKE HIS DAY
CHEAP SHOT, SHREE. WHAT'S WRONG? I'VE NEVER SEEN YOU LIKE THIS BEFORE
SORRY OBREGON, BUT I'M JUST TOO TIRED TO PLAY THE HAPPY HOUSEWIFE TODAY. I'M SICK OF THE LIE
WHAT LIE? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
THEY'LL KILL ME, BUT I DON'T CARE ANYMORE. I THINK I'VE BEEN GOOD AS DEAD FOR YEARS
NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO LIVE WITH IT
Gral got home about the time Shree finished spilling her guts
KAINE?
?

I drank myself stupid two days in a row, trying to forget what Shree Radim had told me.
A few kind souls even volunteered to help me sort through the bad feelings banging around in my head
But I couldn't escape it. I had to get in touch with Gral. I had to hear from his own lips if it was true
Huh?
Huh? SORRY SIR. I MUST'VE INPUT THE WRONG -
CAPTAIN KAINE! I'M COLONEL ZANT, INTERNAL SECURITY
SERGEANT RADIM AND HIS WIFE ARE MISSING. WE NEED YOU TO COME IN AND ANSWER A FEW QUESTIONS.


CAPTAIN KAINE
CAPTAIN KAINE! COME BACK HERE
If they really were missing, then someone must have discovered Shrees security breach. I wondered if she and Gral were already dead
I couldn't be sure without confirming if the "Fallen Friends" program she told me about was real
The only way to do that was to march straight into the lions den
HEY, CHILES! COCKBURST! OVER HERE!

CAPTAIN KAINE ? OPS-COM SAYS YOU WENT *AWOL* WHAT'S UP?
IT'S A *LONG* STORY, INVOLVING A *CASE* OF BOOZE AND *THREE* BALANESE GIRLS WHO WANTED TO SPEND SOME QUALITY TIME WITH A *REAL HERO*
LOOK, I CAN SORT THIS ALL OUT IF I CAN JUST GET SOME *FACE TIME* WITH THE CHIEF OF INTERNAL SECURITY
BUT IF I SCAN IN AT THE *GATE*, THE SYSTEM'LL FLAG ME, AND I'M OFF TO THE *STOCKADE*
C'MON, YOU TWO ARE *FRONTLINE GUARD* CAN YA HELP A FELLOW FRONTLINER IN HIS HOUR OF NEED?
The boys used someone else's pass to get me in -- just like I knew they would
I also knew neither one of them believed my story
They understood that I was using them to slip inside the capital building undetected.
But they were both bucking for promotions...
and if they'd made a scene at the gate, their supervising officer would have stolen the credit for my capture
So they marched me to Chiles' office in silence, all of us knowing how this would have to end

AT EASE, KAINE WE'LL GET THE CHIEF IN HERE ASAP JUST DON'T MAKE ME SHOOT YOU IN THE MEANTIME
CHCHK
I WON'T
KRAK
Now it was just a matter of whipping two grunts who were just as well trained and fierce as I was.
KIYAI!!

-UNH-
KLACHAK
STAY DOWN
Internal security has soundproofed offices, to conduct interrogations without waking the neighbors.
Ahh!
Chiles probably could've fired that rifle and no one would have known
Which, of course, was the whole idea
I needed privacy - and enough time to coax the skeletons out of the closet.

The Fallen Friends files were easy enough to locate, if not to access
Three broken encryption locks later, I found myself wishing that Id never met Gral Radim
You see, all the mission reports and personnel files combined to reveal General Arno Subahdars secret for absolute control of the Frontline Guard
This he acheved by controlling the one thing that could make any one of us give his life without hesitation friendship
From the moment we entered the Academy, we had been tested for aptitude in espionage and intel ops
Top scorers like Gral, were married off to other intel operatives. The couples would then set up networks of "best friends" within the Guard
Grals file named him as handler to six different Frontliners, including me
Id never even heard of these other guys, but every one of them thought just like I did, that they were Grals sole avenger
The program was massive. Almost every Frontliner had a hard-luck story about a dead or injured buddy in whose name they fought like demons
These handlers, or the widows of the dead ones, pushed us to commit inhuman acts if the General deemed it necessary
And whenever we crossed that line that even soldiers dare not cross, our crimes were covered up, or spun into heroic lies
just like they did with me

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Obregon
Armored Air-Cav
Corps of
These handlers, or the widows of the dead ones, pushed us to commit inhuman acts if the General deemed it necessary
And whenever we crossed that line that even soldiers dare not cross, our crimes were covered up, or spun into heroic lies
Just like they did with me

And it all came rushing back
...the smell of blood and bullets
village by village...
kill zone by kill-zone
I had gone to Tan Chiza a good soldier and come home a murderer without even knowing it
And all in the name of a lie

I don't even remember how I bypassed the firewall to export the files.
KLIK
FILE SENT
DESTINATIONS:
*Coastal NewsNet
*The Kazrath Ledger
*Armed Forces NewsRep
*Republink Infotainment
*Headline Comcast
The fact that I had succeeded in sending them would raise the alarm, but it was too late now.
I didn't care anymore if I was found out

because this was General Subahdar's home, and I planned on reaching his living room long before Security could locate me
The government had gone to such lengths to turn me into a monster
Now the monster would turn on it's creator
HELLO, CAPTAIN KAINE SO NICE OF YOU TO VISIT
I HAD A DEVIL OF A TIME CONVINCING MY CHIEF OF SECURITY TO LET YOU "SNEAK IN
BUT HE KNOWS BETTER THAN TO QUESTION MY ORDERS
I TAKE IT YOU CAME FOR THE WHEREABOUTS
OF YOUR QUADRAPLEGIC COMRADE, SERGEANT RADIM
JUST THOUGHT I'D SAVE YOU THE TROUBLE OF LOOKING
KAIN

WAS ANY OF IT EVER REAL GRAL?!
WERE YOU EVEN REALLY TORTURED AT BLACKGLADE, OR DID THIS LITTLE S.O.B BREAK YOUR BACK JUST TO MAKE ME FIGHT HARDER?
WELL?! SAY SOMETHING!
TURNCOAT
Suddenly, my limbs turned to rubber and there was nothing I could do to make them respond
THANK YOU SERGEANT
BIT OF A SHOCK, ISN'T IT CAPTAIN KAINE?
FINDING OUT YOU HAVE AN OFF SWITCH?
ALL FRONTLINE GUARD TROOPS ARE CONDITIONED TO RESPOND TO CERTAIN KEY WORDS AND PHRASES, BUT ONLY IF THEY ARE UTTERED BY YOUR HANDLER
JUST ONE LITTLE WORD FROM SERGEANT RADIM, AND SUDDENLY YOU CAN'T MOVE A MUSCLE FROM THE NECK DOWN
NO!
SORRY, KAINE
NONE OF THAT, RADIM. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE DEMANDS OF THE STATE TRUMP EVEN PERSONAL LOYALTY

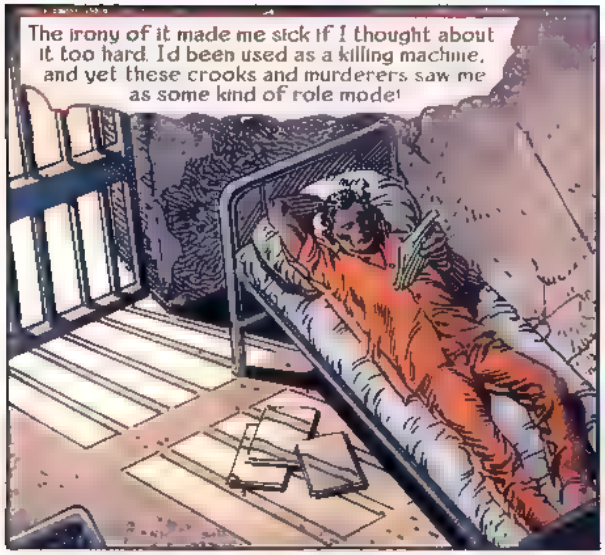
I HAVE TO HAND IT TO YOU, CAPTAIN--I DIDN'T FORESEE *EVERY* MOVE YOU MADE
THAT *FILE* YOU GOT PAST THE FIREWALL THAT *COULD* BE A MAJOR HEADACHE FOR ME
FORTUNATELY *YOU* WILL TELL THE PRESS THAT YOU FABRICATED THE DATA TO COVER UP YOUR *OWN* WAR CRIMES
YOU WILL THEN *WILLINGLY* GO TO PRISON
BECAUSE IF YOU REFUSE I HAVE A *KILL-TEAM* AWAITING THE ORDER TO LIQUIDATE EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOUR KNOWN RELATIVES
My eyes locked on Grals but my brother in arms was nowhere to be found. Only a broken spirit-- a pawn--met my gaze
And I knew that I was no better. We had both been pawns to this tyrant for years
And the Frontline Guard Academy churned out fresh pawns every spring
KAINE, ARE YOU *PAYING ATTENTION?* YOUR ENTIRE EXTENDED FAMILY
AT LAST COUNT, WE'D LOCATED *ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY-SEVEN* OF YOUR BLOOD RELATIVES
AUNTS UNCLES COUSINS

Subahdar rattled off a list of names that would have turned my guts to ice if I were listening...
but at that moment I was miles, years away
staring desperately into Gral's beaten eyes
trying with all my will to bring back one long-lost day from boot camp, when the world was less complicated
...when Gral Radim and I first discovered a bond between warriors that no man like Subahdar would ever understand.
a bond of honor that was stronger than hatred, stronger than death, stronger than lies.
And, like something left for dead, clawing its way up out of a mass grave, I saw Courage fight its way back into my friend's eyes
PATRIOT
NO!
He probably realized his mistake even as he reflexively pulled the trigger
He'd shot the wrong guy first.
BLAM
He just stood there, knowing full well that I'd snatch the gun away before he could draw a bead on me. So he never even tried
TRENCHCOAT
GUESS AGAIN, YOU BLOOD-SUCKING SUNOVA--

I was caught red-handed and a swift court martial followed, even as another dictator immediately replaced Subahdar
Next stop: Death Row, where the government let me rot for years, hoping that I'd fade from public memory
=UNH= TWENTY SIX
=UNH= TWENTY SEVEN
REMEMBER YOUR OLD PAL, AND GETS WRED THE PAYMENT ONLY IF YOU CROAK HIM
YOU JUST WATCH ME
=UNH= TWENTY-EIGHT
CAREFUL, NEW FISH

YOU COULD HURT YOURSELF WITH THAT
-URK-
After I went to prison, the strangest thing happened I became something of a folk hero
The file I e-mailed from the Capitol had made it to the press. No one was more outraged by the revelations it contained than the Frontliners themselves.
An investigation followed, and nobody complained when the Frontline Guard was disbanded
And I was the man who'd exposed the scandal and made the Commander-in-Chief pay for it with his life
The more my fame grew, the more the government feared that executing me would create a martyr
So every few months they paid some snitch or psycho to do the job for them. Not one of them ever came close

You see, I'd made a lot of friends, real friends, in the joint
And that was the biggest surprise of all: that my stretch in prison would become one of the most fulfilling times of my life


The irony of it made me sick if I thought about it too hard. I'd been used as a killing machine, and yet these crooks and murderers saw me as some kind of role model

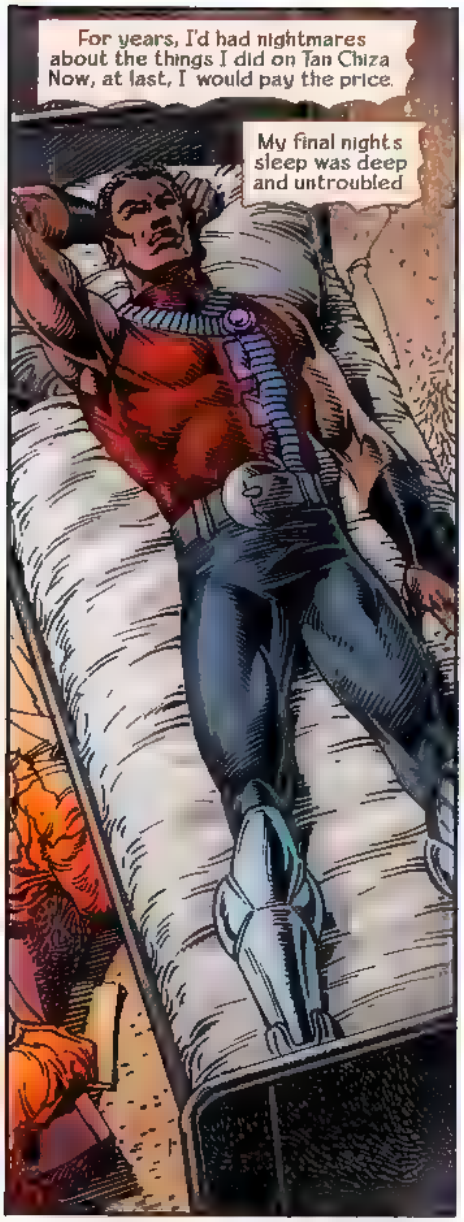
I even managed to talk some sense into a few screwed-up kids
TIME Capsule
KAINE FALLEN HERO

I guess if people insist on making you into something you're not, at least some good can come of it

HEY, KAINE! SPECIAL DELIVERY

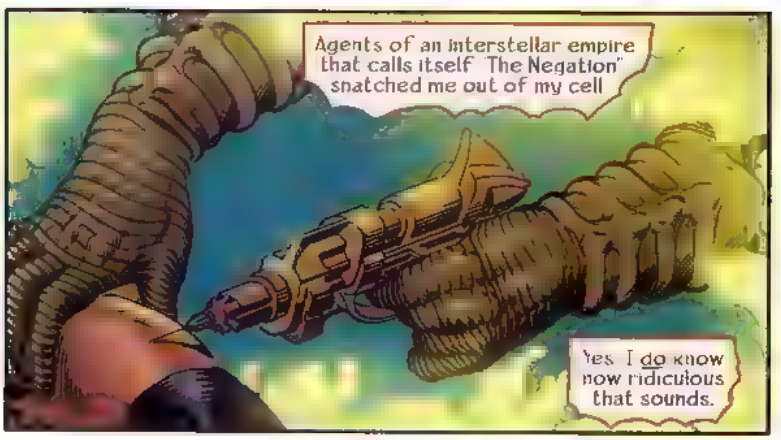
MAKE SURE YOU'RE WEARING IT AT *DAWN* WHEN WE COME FOR YOU

I recognized the uniform immediately. Every condemned man on Kazrath wears one just like it on their last day
After all these years of delays, the government had finally decided it was time to carry out my sentence. That was just fine by me.

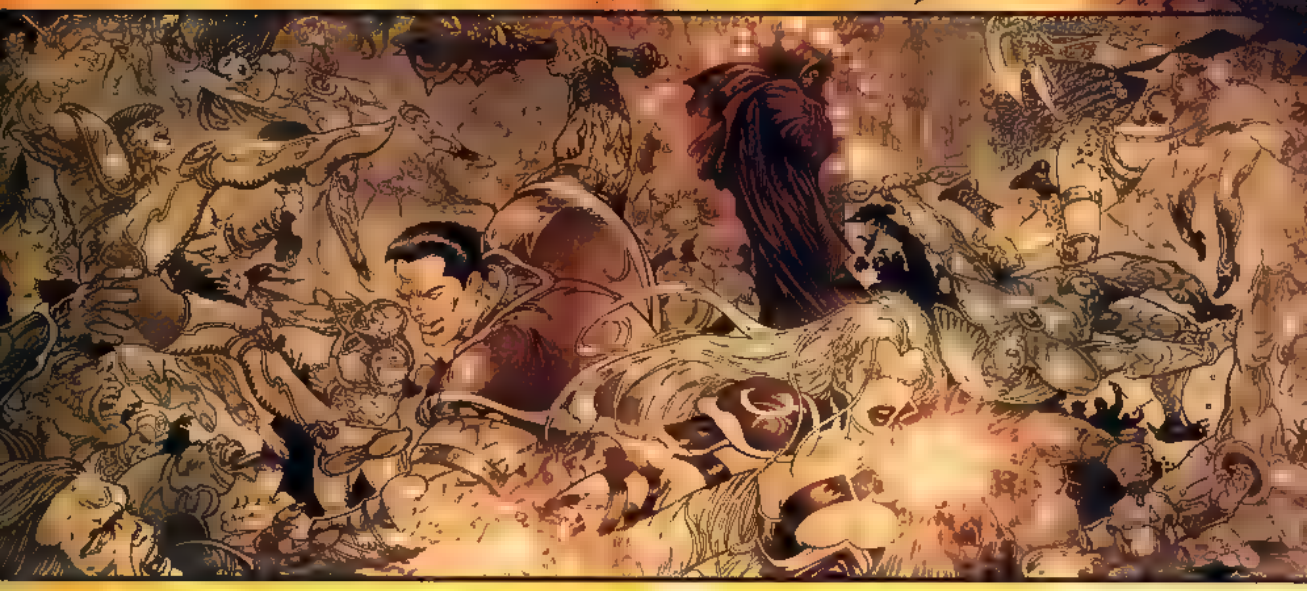

For years, I'd had nightmares about the things I did on Tan Chiza. Now, at last, I would pay the price.
My final night's sleep was deep and untroubled

MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

But someone else had other plans for me
KZZZZZAK


Agents of an interstellar empire that calls itself "The Negation" snatched me out of my cell
Yes, I do know how ridiculous that sounds.

I don t know why they picked me to kidnap, but I wasn t the only one
I ended up in an alien concentration camp, along with prisoners abducted from planets all across our galaxy Naturally, I organized an escape
We ve spent every moment since on the run from Negation forces. Once again I m fighting a guerilla war I guess the more things change, the more they stay the same
But, you know that s okay. At least no one in my new crew pretends to be someone they re not
They re a pretty good bunch, all things considered
Meaning that I still fight for the same reason I ever did for the only reason that ever made any sense
For my friends



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The CrossGen Universe exploded when the Sigil-Bearers were graced with their marks of power – but the worlds of CrossGen existed long before. **Chronicles** tells tales of pasts both distant and recent, detailing rich histories and hinting at mysterious futures...

A hundred thousand years ago...

Atlantis is Earth's greatest society. The Atlanteans, a peaceful civilization of artists and philosophers, have used their phenomenal mental and physical skills to build an island utopia of superhuman beings. The exercise of their psychic gifts is leading the Atlanteans closer to Transition, the point of ultimate evolution and enlightenment. Some question the wisdom of that act of transcendence, others race toward it.

All are questing for knowledge, wisdom, and purpose, especially two exceptional students, Capricia and Danik.

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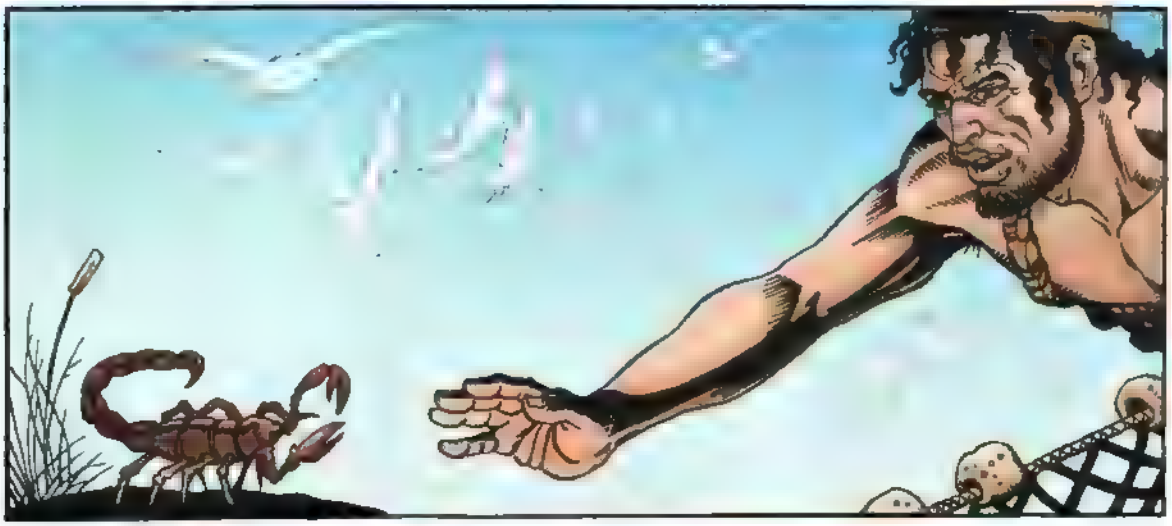
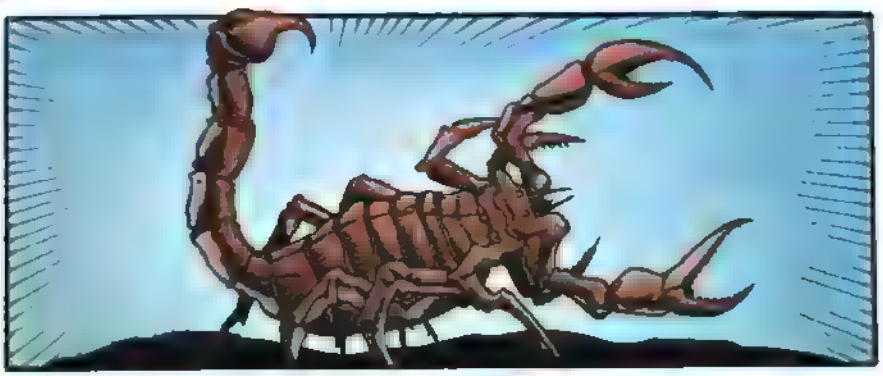
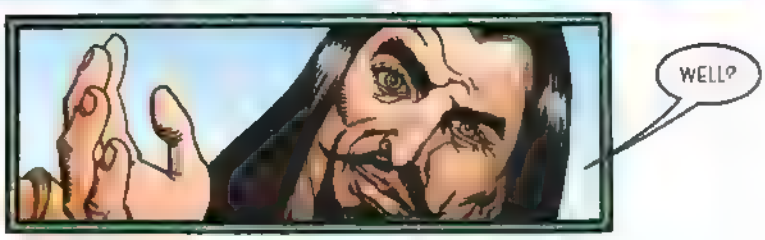





WELL?

CAPRICIA DANIK HOW BEST TO HANDLE A SITUATION LIKE *THIS?*

THIS UNFORTUNATE ***HOMO SAPIENS*** IS ABOUT TO BE THE F RST OF HIS KIND ***EVER*** TO DISCOVER THE ***SCORPION*** AND THE ***DEADLINESS*** OF ITS ***STING***

AS ***OBSERVERS*** DO YOU ACT TO ***STOP*** HIM?

ABSOLUTELY PROFESSOR AMATUS! T S ***POISONOUS!*** IT WILL ***KILL*** HIM!

ABSOLUTELY ***NOT*** HIS DEATH W L BE UNFORTUNATE BUT IN THE BIGGER P CTURE IT WILL TEACH ***OTHERS*** OF HIS RACE A NECESSARY MEASURE OF ***CAUTION***

AND THAT S THE BEST WAY TO ISSUE A ***WARNING?***

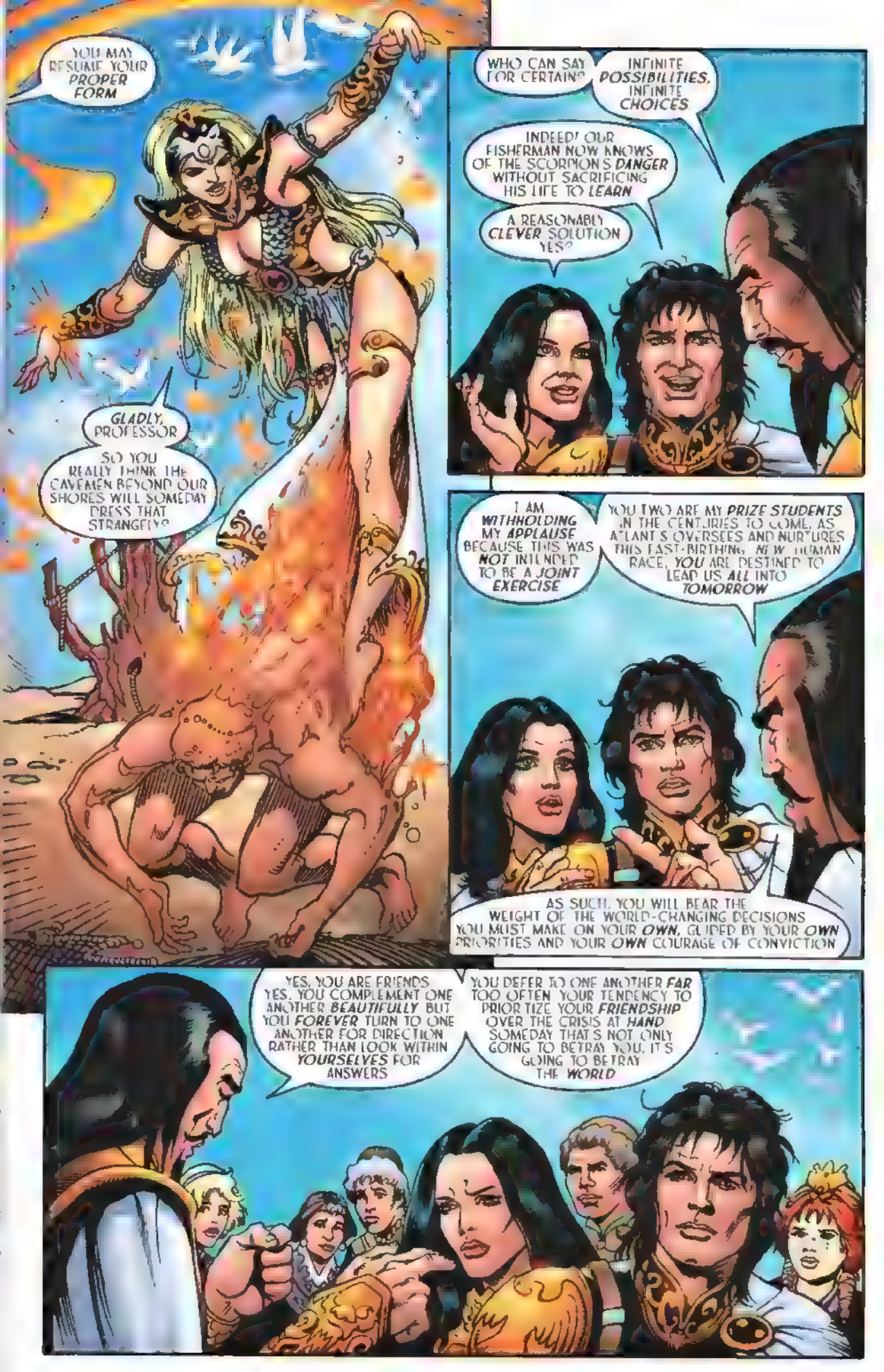
TO ***SURVIVE,*** THE HUMAN RACE MUST LEARN ***HARD LESSONS***

BECAUSE ***YOU RE*** NOT CREATIVE ENOUGH TO SOLVE THIS DILEMMA IN SOME ***INTERMEDIARY FASHION?***

SIGH

THERE THEY GO AGAIN

FOR EXAMPLE CAPRICIA ?
FOR EXAMPLE, DANIK WHO SAYS IT'S THE FISHERMAN WHO HAS TO GET STUNG?
I SEE SO WERE WE TO GIVE ONE OF HIS FISH A TELEKNETIC PUSH
-GASP-
AND SO THE LESSON ENDS
ABRUPTLY
ONCE MORE
STUDENT CYLENI


YOU MAY RESUME YOUR PROPER FORM
GLADLY, PROFESSOR
SO YOU REALLY THINK THE CAVEMEN BEYOND OUR SHORES WILL SOMEDAY DRESS THAT STRANGELY?
WHO CAN SAY FOR CERTAIN?
INFINITE POSSIBILITIES, INFINITE CHOICES
INDEED! OUR FISHERMAN NOW KNOWS OF THE SCORPION'S DANGER WITHOUT SACRIFICING HIS LIFE TO LEARN
A REASONABLY CLEVER SOLUTION YES?
I AM WITHHOLDING MY APPLAUSE BECAUSE THIS WAS NOT INTENDED TO BE A JOINT EXERCISE
YOU TWO ARE MY PRIZE STUDENTS IN THE CENTURIES TO COME, AS ATLANTIS OVERSEES AND NURTURES THIS FAST-BIRTHING NEW HUMAN RACE, YOU ARE DESTINED TO LEAD US ALL INTO TOMORROW
AS SUCH, YOU WILL BEAR THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD-CHANGING DECISIONS YOU MUST MAKE ON YOUR OWN, GUIDED BY YOUR OWN PRIORITIES AND YOUR OWN COURAGE OF CONVICTION
YES, YOU ARE FRIENDS YES, YOU COMPLEMENT ONE ANOTHER BEAUTIFULLY BUT YOU FOREVER TURN TO ONE ANOTHER FOR DIRECTION RATHER THAN LOOK WITHIN YOURSELVES FOR ANSWERS
YOU DEFER TO ONE ANOTHER FAR TOO OFTEN YOUR TENDENCY TO PRIORITIZE YOUR FRIENDSHIP OVER THE CRISIS AT HAND SOMEDAY THAT'S NOT ONLY GOING TO BETRAY YOU, IT'S GOING TO BETRAY THE WORLD

AND I WILL NOT ALWAYS BE AROUND TO HOLD YOUR HANDS
AND THAT WAS THE SECOND-TO-LAST LESSON WE WOULD EVER LEARN FROM OUR MENTOR...
...IN PART BECAUSE DANIK AND I DID BEGIN TO PURSUE OUR OWN PATHS.
WE ATLANTEANS EXPRESSED OURSELVES AND HONED OUR POWER BY SPECIALIZING IN ONE OF THE FOUNDING DISCIPLINES OF SOCIETY. DANIK WAS A STUDENT OF THE SPIRIT--
--CONVINCED THAT THE BETTERMENT OF ATLANTEANS THROUGH INTERNAL ENLIGHTENMENT MEANT THE BETTERMENT OF THE ENTIRE PLANET.
OUR ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY WAS TO GUIDE HUMANITY TO GREATNESS WITH A MINIMUM OF DIRECT INTERFERENCE.
DANIK TENDED TO INTERPRET THAT AS "STRIVE FOR GREATNESS YOURSELF AND BE AN INSPIRATION."
AS A RESULT, DANIK BECAME ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL MINDS, HAD ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL WILLS IN ALL ATLANTIS.

I, ON THE OTHER HAND, CHOSE THE PATH OF EMPATHY -- GROOMING MYSELF TO SOMEDAY BECOME AN "AMBASSADOR" OF SORTS --
--A LIAISON BETWEEN ATLANTEANS AND THE BURGEONING HOMO SAPIENS.
UNLIKE DANIK, MY PATH LED ME DOWN A MORE ARTISTIC ROUTE--
--EMPATHY, OF COURSE, BEING THE ESSENCE OF SEEING WITHIN THE SOULS OF OTHERS AND MIRRORING WHAT'S THERE THROUGH ART AS WELL AS THROUGH ACTION.
AND WHILE OUR FRIENDSHIP ONLY GREW, WE BOTH EVENTUALLY LOST TOUCH WITH AMATUS...

...UNTIL YEARS LATER.

AND IF WE HELP OURSELVES REACH FOR *GREATNESS*, HOW CAN WE *HELP* BUT STIR *OTHERS* TO DO THE SAME WHEN THEIR DAY COMES?

OF COURSE, THE PRACTICE OF FOCUSING ONESELF CONTINUALLY *INWARD*

RISKS CAUSING ONE TO OVERLOOK THE *STUNNING* BEAUTY BEFORE HIS VERY *EYES*

FLATTERER! LET'S GET BACK TO THE LINK BETWEEN SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT AND OTHER MORE *PHYSICAL* ACTIVITIES

AND SO THE STUDENT BECOMES THE *TEACHER*? *HARDLY!*

PROFESSOR *AMATUS*? IT *IS* YOU! HOW LONG HAS IT *BEEN*?

LONG ENOUGH FOR YOU TO HAVE BECOME A *FOOL!*

WHAT? PROFESSOR, I

I HAVE GRAVITATED *AWAY* FROM IT *TRUTH*

MIND SWIM SWIRLING OUT OF *CONTROL* WE MUST HAVE *CONTROL*--!

PROFESSOR *CALM* YOURSELF! THIS DOESN'T SOUND LIKE YOU AT *ALL!*

SOUNDS AND SIGHTS BEYOND Y-YOUR *IMAGINATION*, WHELP - WHAT I HAVE SUH *SEEN*, WHAT I HAVE *HEARD*--

WELL, I HAVE HEARD *ENOUGH* EXCUSE ME

PRATEA, *WAIT!*

DANIL TURNED AWAY FROM AMATUS FOR ONLY A *MOMENT*...

--BUT WHEN.. HE TURNED BACK, AMATUS WAS GONE--

--AND, OVER TIME, NO ONE KNEW HIS WHEREABOUTS.

HE WAS PRESUMED TO HAVE BEEN STUDYING THE NEW HUMAN RACE IN SECRET...

...JUST AS WE LEARNED TO DO.
YOU'RE GETTING PRETTY GOOD AT THIS *INVISIBILITY* THING CAMMO!
ANYONE CAN BEND THE ELECTROMAGNETIC SPECTRUM GIVEN *PRACTICE*
IT'S SIMPLY THAT NOT EVERYONE ENJOYS *HIDING*
WAIT! LOOK! SOME SORT OF *SPONTANEOUS ENERGY* IS EMANATING FROM THAT MAN'S *CRANIAL AREA!*
AND NOW HE'S
HE'S *WRITING?* WHAT A *MAGNIFICENT* LEAP UP THE *EVOLUTIONARY SCALE!*
LOOK MORE *CLOSELY* HE'S NO *AUTHOR*
CAP
HE'S A MESSENGER
CAPRICIA
NEED YOU AND DANIK URGENTLY
FOLLOW SIGNALS TO FIND ME
AMATUS

AS IF HE WERE BEING TELEKINETICALLY MANIPULATED FROM *AFAR*, DANIA. CLEARLY, AMATUS ISN'T AS *LOST* AS WE'D COME TO *BELIEVE*.
HOW'S THE *TRAIL*?

ENERGY READINGS ARE CONSISTENT JUST OVER THAT *RISE*. AMATUS' OWN *MINDPOWER*? SOMETHING HE'S *BUILT*?
JUST WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE HE'S BEEN *UP* TO ALL THIS TIME? DO YOU SUPPOSE IT INVOLVES THE

HUMANS ?

THAT WOULD BE MY GUESS

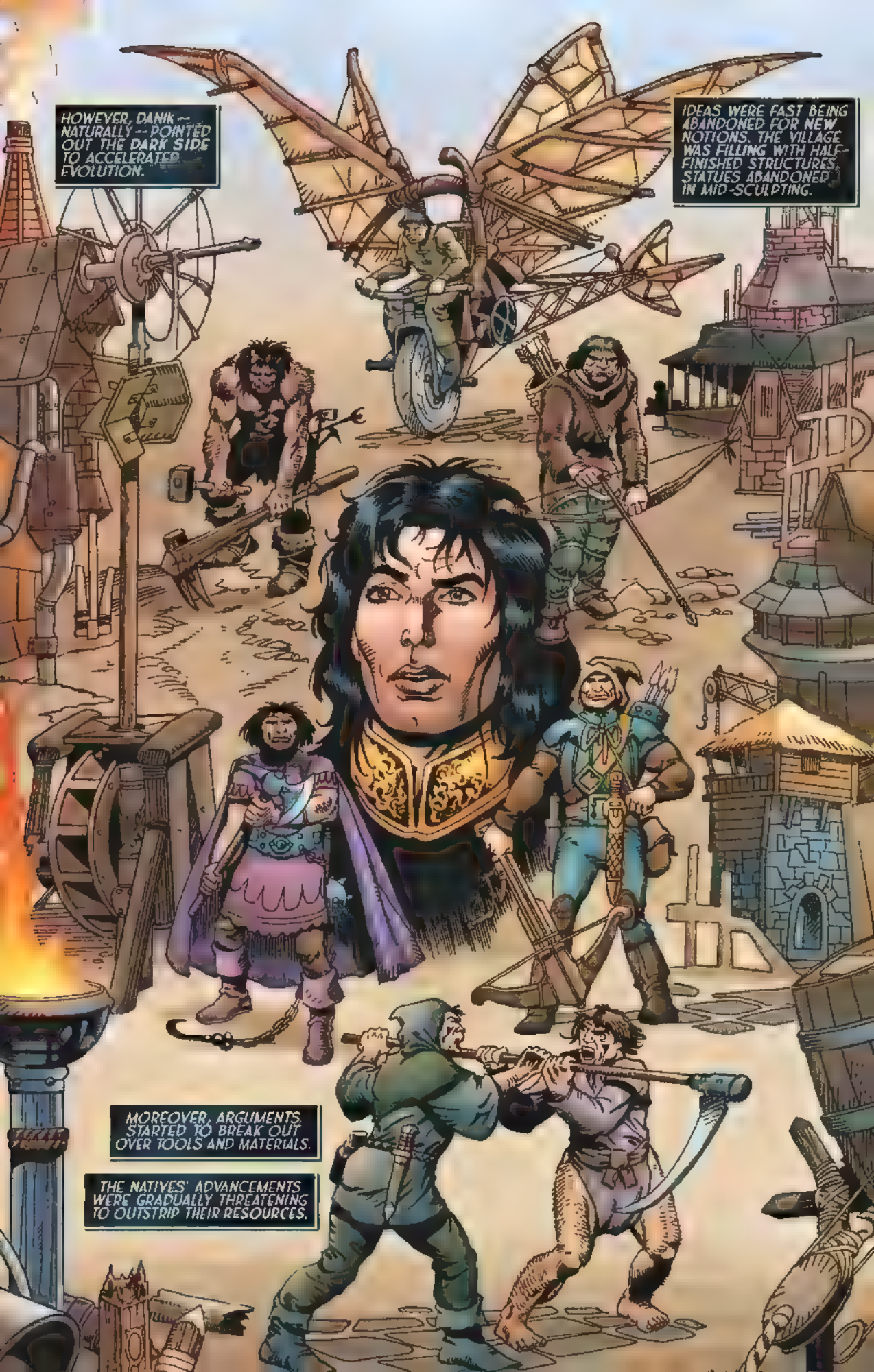
IT WAS INCREDIBLE...BUT UNLIKE OUR FISHERMAN OF SO LONG AGO, THIS WAS NO ILLUSION.
WERE THESE HUMANS AT ALL? HAD WE STUMBLED ONTO SOME HERETOFORE-UNKNOWN ADVANCED CIVILIZATION?
IF SO, HOW COULD THEY HAVE ESCAPED OUR NOTICE? AND IF NOT...
WHAT RACED THESE PEOPLE SO QUICKLY UP THE EVOLUTIONARY LADDER?
I'VE A FEELING WHOEVER'S IN THAT OBSERVATION TOWER CAN TELL US
OURSELVES
BY ALL MEANS! AND HURRY!

I THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER GET HERE!

I TRUST YOU'VE ALREADY EXAMINED YOUR SURROUNDINGS
QUITE R-REMARKABLE, WOULDN'T YOU SAY?
THAT'S A WORD FOR IT PROFESSOR. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? HOW DID YOU FIND THESE PEOPLE?
HOW DID I FIND THEM?
LACKING THE MOST BASIC OF SKILLS, THE SAME AS ALL THE OTHER THOUSANDS OF PRIMITIVES OUT THERE
I MADE THEM INTO SOMETH NG ELSE
WHAT? THIS IS YOUR DOING? BUT HOW--WHY--?
WHY? I CAME TO STUDY ONE LARGE TRIBE. buhhhh..
BUT I GOT BORED, FRANKLY BECAUSE THEY WERE--AGAIN--LIKE ALL THE OTHER THOUSANDS OF PRIMITIVES OUT THERE
WOULDN'T IT BE MORE INTERESTING, I DECIDED
TO GIVE THEM A LITTLE HELPING HAND IN THE PROCESS OF SOCIETAL GROWTH?
I CONSTRUCTED TERRAFORMING EQUIPMENT THAT MADE THE LAND HERE FLUH FL FERTILE AND SHIELDED IT FROM THE HARSH ELEMENTS--
--AFTER WHICH I INTRODUCED ITS PEOPLE TO NEW LEVELS OF TECHNOLOGY--AND LET THEM LOOSE! NOW LOOK AT THEM!
WE WE SEE PROFESSOR. HOW LONG HAS THIS BEEN GOING ON?
Hmmm.
I'D SAY ABOUT A WEEK

AND WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?
PROFESSOR, THIS, THIS ISN'T RIGHT. THE ATLANTEAN COUNCIL NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT THIS IMMEDIATELY.
REALLY? I BEG TO DIFFER UNLESS, OF COURSE, YOU TRULY HAVE BECOME FAR WISER THAN YOUR TEACHER HAVE YOU?
I
WE
THERE'S NO PERIL. IN FACT, I WANT YOU TO SEE HOW HAPPY THESE PEOPLE ARE SIMPLY TO NOT HAVE TO FORAGE TO SURVIVE!
YOU MUST ADMIT THE RESULTS ARE FASCINATING AND VERY REVELATORY.
GIVE IT ANOTHER DAY OR TWO, AS A FAVOR TO ME, IF NEED BE OR DON'T YOU OWE ME THAT MUCH?
AND WE THOUGHT WE DID... DESPITE OUR HORROR AND OUR BETTER JUDGMENT.
BUT IT DIDN'T TAKE A STUDENT OF EMPATHY TO KNOW THE PROFESSOR HAD CHANGED. HIS SPEECH ALONE SEEMED...OFF. VAGUELY APHASIC. MOST LIKELY A SIDE EFFECT OF YEARS OF SECLUSION...
...BUT WHEN I GENTLY, DISCREETLY ATTEMPTED TO SCAN HIM TELEPATHICALLY...
...I FOUND THAT AMATUS HAD ERECTED MENTAL SHIELDS TO KEEP US OUT OF HIS HEAD.
OBVIOUSLY, HE WAS HIDING SOMETHING--AND FINDING OUT WHAT GAVE US THE BEST REASON YET NOT TO LEAVE.

WE WANDERED THE VILLAGE FOR HOURS THAT SEEMED LIKE DECADES... BECAUSE THEY MAY AS WELL HAVE BEEN.
AS WE WATCHED, THE HUMANS DISCOVERED INCREASINGLY ADVANCED AGRICULTURAL TECHNIQUES...
...THE CULTIVATING AND LOOMING OF TEXTILES...
...AND THE MINING AND SMELTING OF CRUDE METALS. I WAS ASTONISHED.


HOWEVER, DANIK -- NATURALLY -- POINTED OUT THE DARK SIDE TO ACCELERATED EVOLUTION.
IDEAS WERE FAST BEING ABANDONED FOR NEW NOTIONS. THE VILLAGE WAS FILLING WITH HALF-FINISHED STRUCTURES, STATUES ABANDONED IN MID-SCULPTING.
MOREOVER, ARGUMENTS STARTED TO BREAK OUT OVER TOOLS AND MATERIALS.
THE NATIVES' ADVANCEMENTS WERE GRADUALLY THREATENING TO OUTSTRIP THEIR RESOURCES.

mmNNNnn
YOU AREN'T THE ONLY ONE NURTURING A HEADACHE.
WHAT COULD BE BRINGING IT ON?
HARD TO SAY. ATMOSPHERIC CONDITIONS? LEY LINES? IT COULD EASILY BE A LOCAL PHENOMENON--NEITHER OF US IS TERRIBLY ACCUSTOMED TO SPENDING THIS MUCH TIME AWAY FROM HOME
THEN WE SHOULD RECONSIDER THAT.
BECAUSE, CLEARLY, WE'VE MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT THE HOMO SAPIENS RACE
SO YOU'RE SAYING--?
I'M SAYING THAT IF THE SIMPLE GIFT OF CRUDE TECHNOLOGY COULD LEAD THEM THIS FAR THIS SWIFTLY--
--THEN THEIR CEREBRAL FUNCTIONS ARE FAR MORE ALIEN TO OURS THAN WE'D EVER SUSPECTED
YOU SOUND PLEASED
AND YOU SOUND NERVOUS. IT'S A BLESSING, DANIK
PERHAPS THIS IS WHAT HUMANITY IS CAPABLE OF GIVEN THE PROPER STIMULUS, THE PROPER--

I NEVER GOT TO FINISH THE HYPOTHESIS.
INCREDIB. E NOW THEY RE RIOTING? OVER WHAT?
OUR OBSERVATION WAS OVER. WE PRIED THE CROWD APART WITH TELEKINESIS TO FIND THEM FIGHTING OVER--
DARUKA N'UNTA!
GON-TA! GON-TA!
--A SIMPLE BASKET OF CORN.
I PERFORMED A BRIEF BUT UNNECESSARY TELEPATHIC TRANSLATION:
FRICTION HAD BEGUN TO BREAK OUT OVER DWINDLING SUPPLIES.
THESE PEOPLE COULD INVENT ALL THE TECHNOLOGY THEY WISHED--
--BUT NONE OF IT COULD MAKE THEIR FOOD GROW ANY FASTER.

ALL I KNOW TO DO FOR THE MOMENT IS TO TAKE THIS AWAY FROM EVERYONE
ANOTHER DRAWBACK TO TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT WITHOUT ACCOMPANYING SPIRITUAL GROWTH
LIFE BECOMES ABOUT THINGS, ABOUT POSSESSIONS, ABOUT OWNING IN LIEU OF SHARING
AND WITH A LIMIT TO THE PHYSICAL RESOURCES IN THIS VILLAGE, IT'S ONLY GOING TO GET WORSE IT'S SIMPLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL--
AAAAGH!
UNTIL

SPLENDID. IT'S WORKING AND WELL.
WH- ?
WHAT? YOUR MISGUIDED SOCIOLOGICAL EXPERIMENT?
Oh, PITY, NO. THE VIR-VIRUS
I'VE BEEN GONE FROM ATLANTIS QUITE A WHILE, THAT'S TUI TR RR R UE BUT THE WHY OF IT
FOR YEARS, I'D BEEN SEARCHING FOR A WAY TO ENHANCE THE POWER OF MY MIND, OF MY INTELLECT
I SUCCEEDED
A THERETOFORE-UNDISCOVERED COMBINATION OF NEUROCHEMICALS DID THE TUI TRICK & MY MIND WAS RACING HUNDREDS OF TIMES MORE QUICKLY THAN BEFORE
NEW IDEAS. NEW INVENTIONS WERE SPAWNING BY THE INSTANT INSIDE MY BRAIN. YES. SPAWNING
FOR THE IDEAS THEMSELVES ARE SO INTENSE, SO ELECTROCHEMICALLY CHARGED, THAT THEY HAVE BECOME LIVING ORGANISMS. A VIRUS THAT MULTIPLIES IN MY HEAD, A LOUD, VIVIFIED CLAMOR OF GENIUS.
AND IT WANTED OUT
TO PROTECT MY PEERS, I FLED. GIVEN THE POWER OF THE ATLANTEAN MIND, WITH ITS PREDILECTION TOWARDS TELEPATHY. HOW LONG WOULD IT BE BEFORE THE VIRUS SPR & READ?
I AM OLD, CHILDREN. MY AGED MIND, MY AGED WILL, COULD NEVER CONTAIN IT. BUT THERE WAS NO WAY TO BANISH IT
NO WAY TO ERADICATE IT SO LONG AS MY BRAIN PUMPED BLOOD. SO LONG AS I REMAINED ALIVE
NONETHELESS, DESPITE HOW FAR I TRAVELED, THE VIRUS GREW STRONGER THE LONGER I CONTAINED IT. THE SOONER IT WOULD DRIVE ME MAD, THIS I REASONED--
--AND THAT'S WHEN I HAD MY MOST BRILLIANT IDEA
TO GIFT A RACE ABORNING WITH IT. AND ALLOW THEM TO CARRY IT TO OTHERS IN TURN AS THEIR CIVILIZATION SPREADS ACROSS THE GLOBE
TO RELEASE IT AMONG THE SAVAGES

THAT'S WHAT'S DRIVING THE PEOPLE NOT INVENTION NOT INSIGHT
A MENTAL PLAGUE
THE CAUSE OF AMATUS APHASIA THE HEADACHES OUR OWN MINDS ATTEMPTING TO FEND IT OFF?
LIKELY DANIK, WHAT DO WE DO?
WE'VE SEEN WHAT HAPPENS WE CAN'T SIMPLY LET INFECTED HUMANS ROAM THE PLANET.
AGREED BUT IF DEATH IS THE ONLY CURE, IT PRESENTS US ONE SOLE SOLUTION
CAPRICIA THE VILLAGERS MUST BE EXPUNGED DISPOSED OF BEFORE THEY TAINT THE ENTIRE HOMO SAPIENS RACE! ERASED
JUST SAY 'MURDERED, DANIK' IN COLD BLOOD? FOR FOR WHAT? FOR THE CRIME OF HAVING IDEAS! FOR HAVING IMAGINATION?
HOW IS QUARANTINE NOT AN OPTION? SURELY THESE PEOPLE CAN BE GUIDED--THEIR MINDS REFOCUSED ON ART AND AESTHETICS RATHER THAN SELFISHNESS AND VIOLENCE!
AND SO WE CONTINUED TO BICKER FOR PRECIOUS MINUTES, CONFISCATED FOOD AT OUR SIDE, WE'D FORGOTTEN THE PRIZE WE'D TAKEN.
THE VILLAGERS HAD NOT.

QUARANTINE THEM HOW? BY BUILDING WALLS AROUND THEIR HOME
LIMITING THEIR OUTSIDE RESOURCES EVEN FURTHER TO CREATE MORE STRIFE AND CONFLICT?
LOOK AT THE LARGER CANVAS! HYPEREVOLUTION IS DISASTROUS! THOSE INFECTED PUT EVERYONE ON EARTH AT RISK!
SO WE OBLITERATE LIFE? WE SIMPLY ABANDON EVERYTHING WE STAND FOR? EVERYTHING WE WISH TO ACCOMPLISH?
WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE SUPPORTIVE OF HUMANITY, NOT DESTROY IT, OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN?
LISTEN TO YOURSELF!
IDEAS THEMSELVES AREN'T DANGEROUS!
WHO'S TO SAY THAT THEY'LL INEVITABLY LEAD TO TROUBLE JUST BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT SUBJECT TO YOUR INSUFFERABLE TENDENCY TOWARDS CONTROL?
WE ATLANTEANS WILL MERELY HAVE TO INVOLVE OURSELVES MORE DIRECTLY WITH THIS V.I. AGE --
THAT IS JUST LIKE YOU! YOU'RE IGNORING THE BIG PICTURE! OUR TASK AS MENTORS IS DELICATE AND DIFFICULT ENOUGH AS IS!
TO DEVOTE ALL OF ATLANTIS TO MONITORING AND CARING FOR ONE SOCIETY IS TO IGNORE THE ENTIRE WORLD! IT'S STUPID -
NEVER CALL ME STUPID!

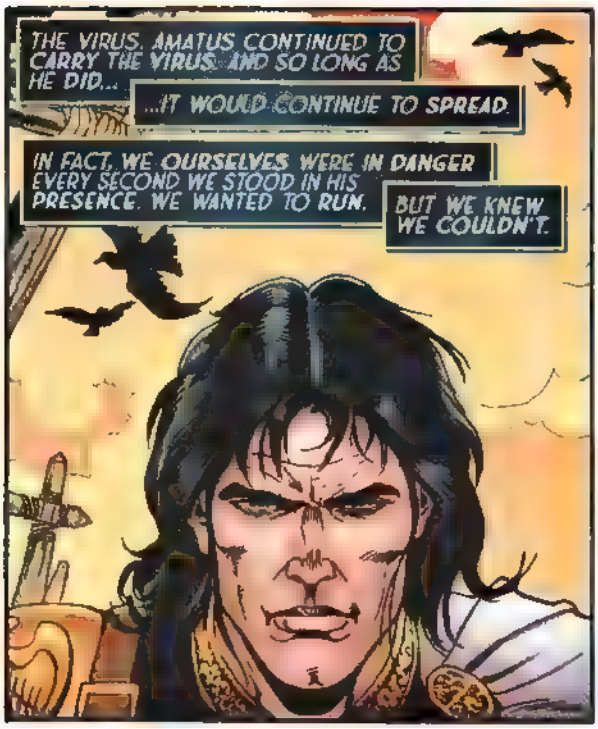
I DIDN'T--
JUST BECAUSE NOT EVERYONE THINKS LIKE YOU DOESN'T MAKE THEM STUPID!
AND WITH THAT, WE'D RUN OUT OF ARGUMENT.
IT WAS THE VERY FIRST TIME WE COULDN'T COME TOGETHER ON SOMETHING. THE FIRST TIME OUR CONVICTIONS OUTWEIGHED OUR FRIENDSHIP.
AND IT WAS AWFUL.
THEN THINGS GOT WORSE.
AAAAHH!
THE PAIN WAS INDESCRIBABLE. LIKE THE WORLD'S WORST EPILEPTIC FIT.
A BIOFEEDBACK SEIZURE IN THE BRAIN.
OUR TELEPATHIC MINDS WERE REACTING--
--TO THE SUDDEN ANNIHILATION OF AN ENTIRE VILLAGE.

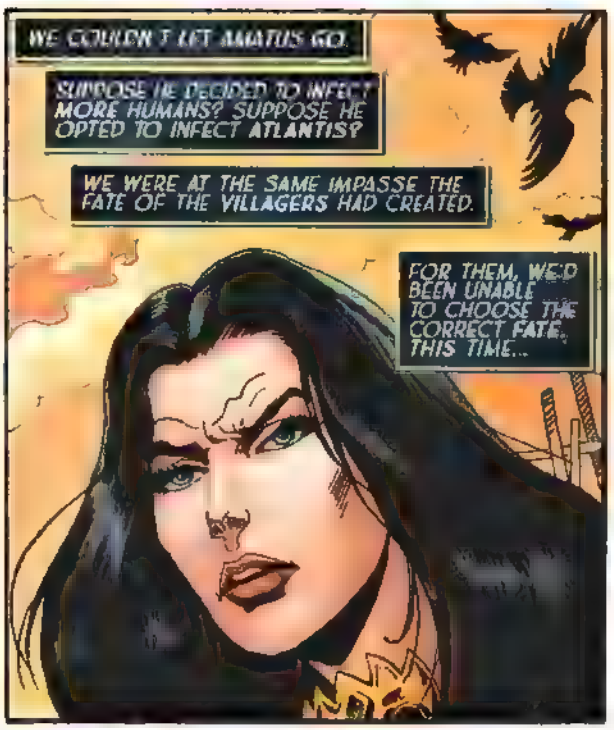
BRAVO
PANIK AND CAPRICIA AT ONE ANOTHERS THROATS NOW THAT'S WHAT I WANTED TO SEE
Oh YOU WERE MY BRIGHTEST STUDENTS DON'T LOOK SO SURPR ! - RISED YOU DISAPPOINT ME
MY ATLANTEAN MIND CAN BARELY CONTAIN THE VIRUS, THIS WE KNOW THE HOMO SAPIENS MIND SIMPLY CANNOT NOT FOR VERY LONG
I DID ALL OF THIS TO MAKE A POINT THESE SUB ATLANTEAN VILLAGERS WEREN'T MADE FOR GREATNESS THEY WERE MEANT TO TEACH YOU WHAT YOU NEVER WANTED TO LEARN BEFORE
DIVISION

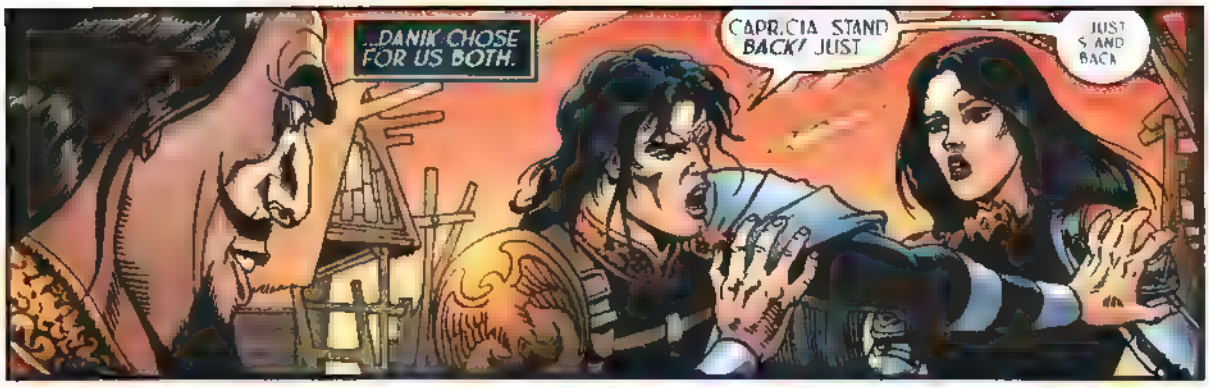
PRECISELY! IT'S TIME SOMEONE DROVE A WEDGE BETWEEN YOU TWO! YOU SPEAK OF A LARGER CANVAS?
THIS... THIS IS THE LARGER CANVAS!

THIS IS SACRIFICING A HANDFUL OF ANIMALS TO TAKE TOMORROW'S LEADERS TO A MUCH-NEEDED NEW PLATEAU OF INDEPENDENT THINKING...A WHOLE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON YOUR LIFE'S MISSION!
THE FAVOR I HAVE DONE YOU DONE THE FUTURE OF CIVILIZATION, OF THE WORLD

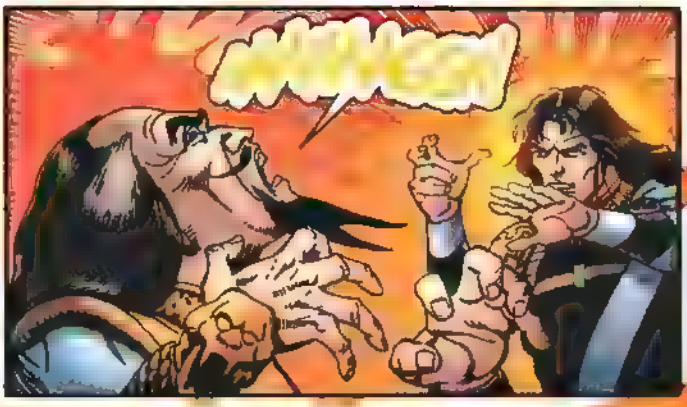
IS IMMEASURABLE


THE VIRUS. AMATUS CONTINUED TO CARRY THE VIRUS. AND SO LONG AS HE DID...
...IT WOULD CONTINUE TO SPREAD.
IN FACT, WE OURSELVES WERE IN DANGER EVERY SECOND WE STOOD IN HIS PRESENCE. WE WANTED TO RUN.
BUT WE KNEW WE COULDN'T.


WE COULDN'T LET AMATUS GO.
SUPPOSE HE DECIDED TO INFECT MORE HUMANS? SUPPOSE HE OPTED TO INFECT ATLANTIS?
WE WERE AT THE SAME IMPASSE THE FATE OF THE VILLAGERS HAD CREATED.
FOR THEM, WE'D BEEN UNABLE TO CHOOSE THE CORRECT FATE. THIS TIME...


...DANIK CHOSE FOR US BOTH.
CAPRICIA, STAND BACK! JUST
JUST STAND BACK

AMATUS, I AM WHO I AM TODAY BECAUSE OF YOU. YOU WERE MY GUIDING STAR
YOU WERE MY FRIEND. YOU KNOW ME
AND THAT IS WHY YOU KNOW WHAT I HAVE TO DO

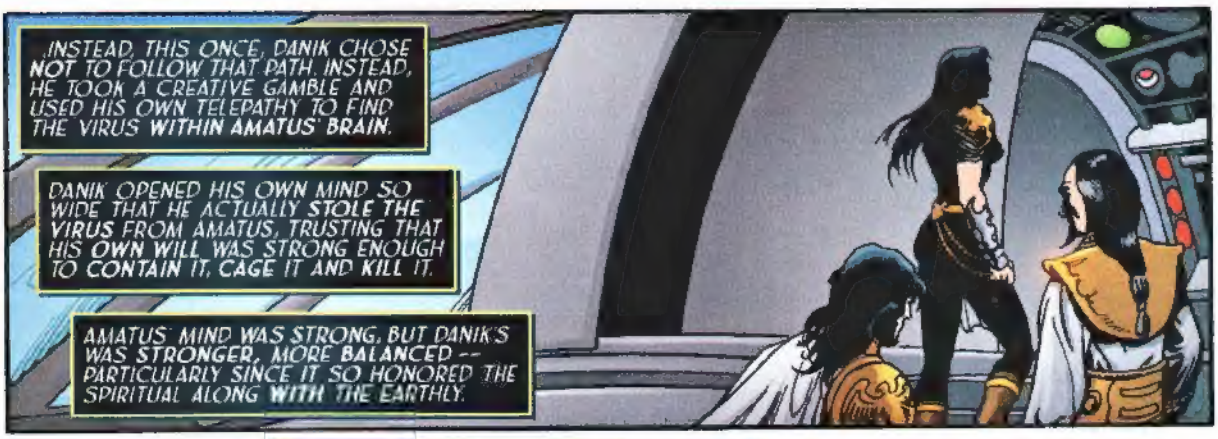

AHHHGGH

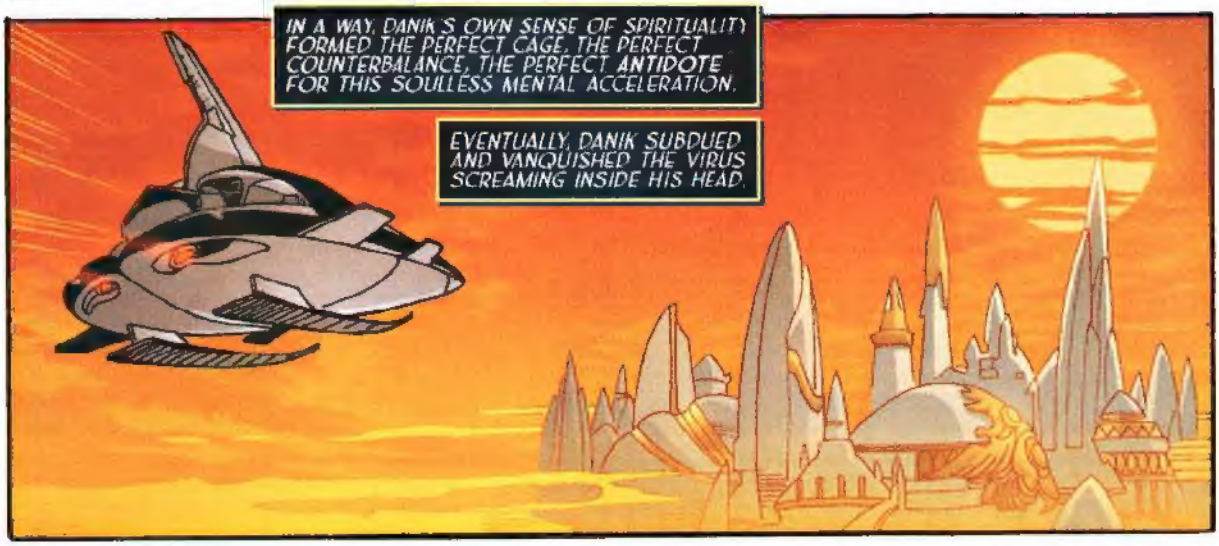
STANDING THERE, WATCHING, MY SENSES EXPLODED. I COULD SMELL AMATUS' TERROR...TASTE DANIK'S SORROW...
...AND HEAR THE SOUND OF SOMETHING, ETHEREAL...WRENCHED FROM AMATUS' BODY...

...AND LEAVING...
...NEVER TO RETURN

DANIK!
DANIK! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
DANIK!
HE WOULDN'T SPEAK. HE WOULDN'T EVEN LOOK AT ME.
HE COULDN'T.
"OH"
AMATUS? BUT--BUT I THOUGHT YOU WERE--
DEAD? NO.
THE GODS ARE NOT THAT MERCIFUL.
THEY LET ME LIVE, CAPRICIA, AND LET ME SEE WITH HORRIBLE, HORRIBLE SANITY WHAT I HAVE DONE--
--TO MYSELF--TO THE VILLAGERS--
--AND TO DANIK.

I'D MISUNDERSTOOD, AT FIRST. I THOUGHT DANIK HAD KILLED AMATUS IN THE NAME OF THE "LARGER CANVAS." INSTEAD...


INSTEAD, THIS ONCE, DANIK CHOSE NOT TO FOLLOW THAT PATH. INSTEAD, HE TOOK A CREATIVE GAMBLE AND USED HIS OWN TELEPATHY TO FIND THE VIRUS WITHIN AMATUS' BRAIN.
DANIK OPENED HIS OWN MIND SO WIDE THAT HE ACTUALLY STOLE THE VIRUS FROM AMATUS, TRUSTING THAT HIS OWN WILL WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO CONTAIN IT, CAGE IT AND KILL IT.
AMATUS' MIND WAS STRONG, BUT DANIK'S WAS STRONGER, MORE BALANCED -- PARTICULARLY SINCE IT SO HONORED THE SPIRITUAL ALONG WITH THE EARTHLY.


IN A WAY, DANIK'S OWN SENSE OF SPIRITUALITY FORMED THE PERFECT CAGE, THE PERFECT COUNTERBALANCE, THE PERFECT ANTIDOTE FOR THIS SOULLESS MENTAL ACCELERATION.
EVENTUALLY, DANIK SUBDUED AND VANQUISHED THE VIRUS SCREAMING INSIDE HIS HEAD.

BUT IT TOOK TEN YEARS.

A DECADE OF DIMINISHING MADNESS. THAT'S WHAT HE SUFFERED.
IT CAME TO AN END WHEN ALL WAS SAID AND DONE, A THOROUGH TELEPATHIC SCREENING BY THE ATLANTEAN COUNCIL VERIFIED THAT DANIK'S BRAIN WAS "CLEAN."

DANIK HAD IGNORED HIS INSTINCTS. KILLING AMATUS WOULD HAVE SERVED THE GREATER GOOD, WHICH WAS ALWAYS THE FOCUS OF DANIK'S VISION
INDEED, DANIK CHOSE A SOLUTION THAT RAN CONTRARY TO HIS PHILOSOPHY. IT WORKED...
...BUT THE SCARS IT LEFT BEHIND ONLY STRENGTHENED HIS RESOLVE.
FROM THAT DAY ON, THERE WAS NO TOLERANCE IN DANIK FOR MINUTIAE.

ONLY FOR THE BIGGER PICTURE...

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